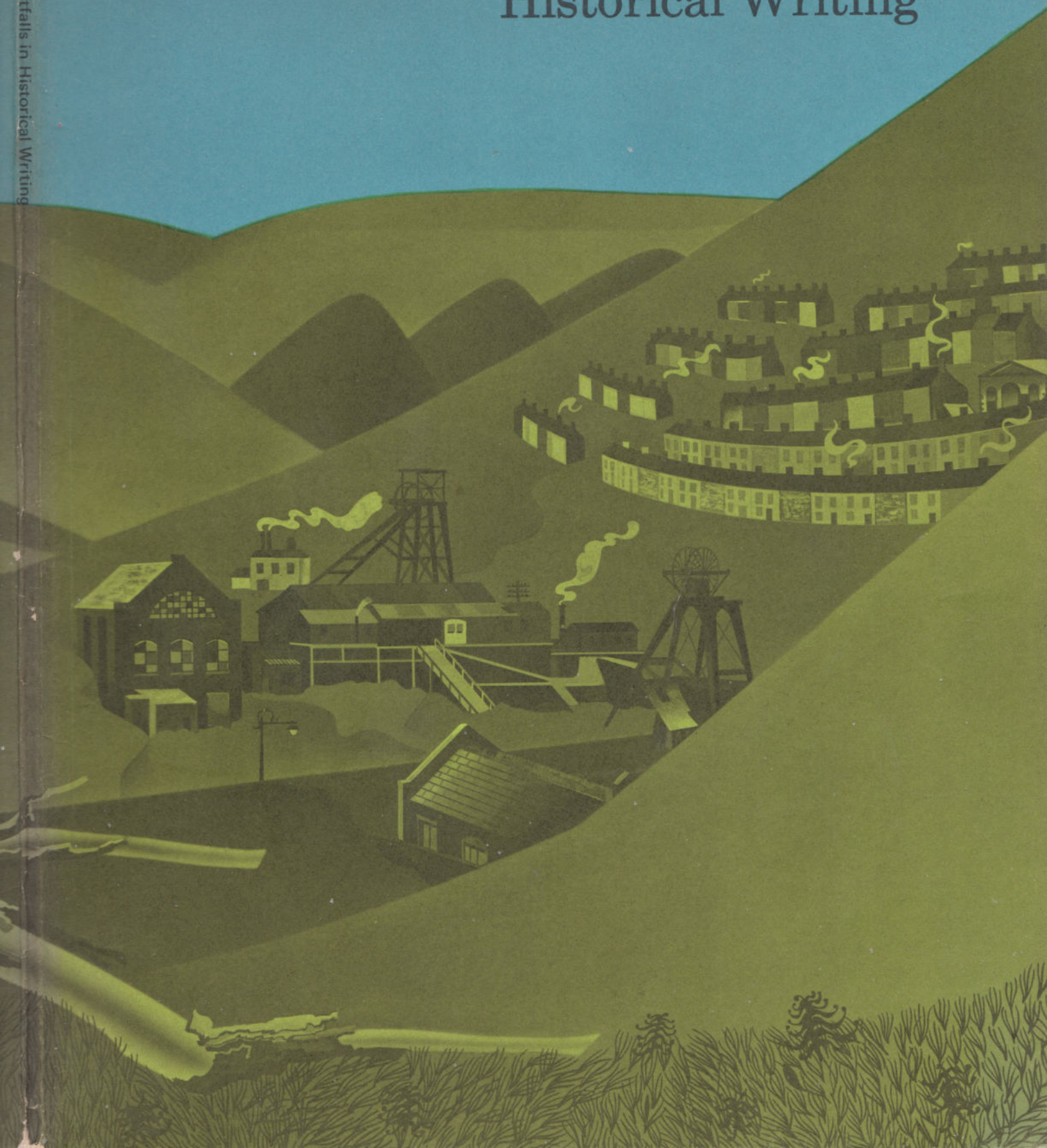




Common Pitfalls in Historical Writing





The Open University

Humanities: A Foundation Course **Unit 8** *Introduction to History Part 4*

COMMON PITFALLS IN HISTORICAL WRITING

Prepared by Arthur Marwick for the Arts Foundation Course Team



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PART 4

COMMON PITFALLS IN HISTORICAL WRITING

40.1 Historical Semantics. Difficult words in history – feudalism, revolution, capitalism, etc. – and how to handle them.

40.2 The Need to be Concrete and Precise in Historical Writing. 'The hall-mark of the historically-minded person is an itch for the concrete, a desire to get behind generalisations to the facts upon which they are based and to establish an almost physical relationship with the texture of earlier times.'

40.3 The Reasons for Controversy in Historical Writing. Why historians disagree with each other.

40.4 The Value of Historical Controversy. Controversy can produce some valuable results.

40.5 Evaluating History and Historians. A checklist for assessing historical writing – your own, and books by professional historians.

Radio and TV Programmes. Remember the radio supplement is at the end of the unit. There is a separate supplement for the television programme.

Assignment. This week the assignment takes the form of a one-thousand word essay to be completed by the end of the week; details are contained in the separate assignment package.

Set Books. There are references to the following pages of *The Nature of History*:

165–170 (Historical Semantics: words which have changed their meaning through the ages and 'geographical abstractions'); 227–231 (Discussion of the Industrial Revolution); 39 (Contrast between Ranke and Burckhardt); Chapter 7 (Problems and controversies in history); 240 (Criticisms of conventional history teaching at the older universities);

and to the following pages of *Early Modern Europe*:

72 (Definition of capitalism); 126 (Definition of mercantilism); 150–151 (Definitions of baroque); 59–61 (Used in exercise on semantic problems).

'*Introduction to History*' was prepared by Arthur Marwick, with the advice of Derek Rowntree, M. Macdonald-Ross and C. T. Harvie.

PART 4 COMMON PITFALLS IN HISTORICAL WRITING

40.1 Historical Semantics

296 'Semantics' means 'the study of the meaning of words'. There is no need whatsoever for you to embark on such a study. But it is very important that you should appreciate the difficulties which arise in historical writing from the use of what we might call 'labelling words', such as 'Revolution', 'Romanticism', 'Feudalism', 'Capitalism', 'Radical'. Every time we use one of these words we are involved in a semantic problem, that is to say, a problem involving the meaning of the particular word used.

Such words are essential in historical writing: pick up any history book and you will find dozens of them. But often they are used in such a vague, imprecise way, that instead of contributing to the communication of historical understanding they merely contribute to confusion.

297 There are six main types of problems in historical semantics:

(1) Words which did actually exist in the periods of the past about which the historian wishes to write, but which, down through the ages, have changed in meaning. Example: 'Revolution'.

(2) Words which have been invented later to describe something in a past age, but *which were actually unknown to the people of the time*. Example: 'Feudalism'.

(3) Words which we use loosely in everyday speech, which, because of their vagueness, can be confusing when used in a historical context. Example: 'the people'.

(4) Words used in conjunction with periodisation (above, 30.8). Example: 'the Renaissance'.

(5) Words which exist in one language, but do not have an exact equivalent in another language. The translation, therefore, will be inexact and likely to give rise to confusion. Example: the Russian word '*Krepostnoi*', usually translated as serf, though in fact the Russian serf was completely different from the medieval English serf.

(6) 'Geographical abstractions'. Example: 'Europe' – historians do talk about, say, 'Europe in the tenth century', though in fact people at the time were scarcely aware of a geographical area called Europe; they tended instead to talk about 'Christendom'.

(1) Some of the best-known examples of words which have changed in meaning through the ages are discussed in *The Nature of History*, pp. 165–169.

298 One which gives a lot of trouble, and which you will encounter in a later part of this Foundation Course, is 'Radical'. In strict accordance with the derivation of the word from the original Latin, a radical is someone who advocates reform 'by the roots', that is to say extreme reform. In Britain in the early nineteenth century the word was used of those who opposed the existing political system, and in fact covered a pretty wide range of opinions. However, the word became particularly associated with politically active middle-class figures who desired among other things: (1) as much reform in the political system as would give them the vote; (2) removal of traditional restrictions on industry and trade; and (3) reform of the

antiquated legal system. In the later nineteenth century radical usually meant the more extreme members of the Liberal Party, though earlier there had been 'Tory radicals' who showed a greater interest in social questions (e.g. factory reform) than did the Conservative or Tory Party in general. Radical issues, however, remained largely middle-class issues; by the early twentieth century (as we saw in our discussion of Kenneth Morgan's *Wales in British Politics*) radicalism was beginning to seem old-fashioned compared with the growth of Labour politics and socialism. Today 'radical' usually means someone who holds views of a more extreme character than those of the majority of his own political party; but to give the word any kind of precise meaning it is necessary to add a further qualifying word: e.g. 'Liberal radical', 'radical socialist', 'Christian radical'.

299 In France the term Radical actually became the official title of a political party, which, in the main, stood in alliance with the independent French peasantry for moderate middle-class reformism. The association with middle-class interests, then, both in France and Britain and elsewhere is a strong one. But it is important to remember that 'Radical' is a political label describing (often somewhat vaguely) a man's political opinions, *not his social class*. An aristocrat, or a worker, could be a radical (though note, equally, that radicalism does *not* generally connote a working-class movement); if you want to pin a man down by his social class, or economic position, call him 'middle-class', or 'a professional man', or 'a banker', or whatever he is.

300 (2) The best example of the second type of problem is the word 'feudalism' (along with the adjective 'feudal' and the phrase 'feudal system'). This word was first used in the eighteenth century to describe the somewhat ill-defined social structure which existed in Europe for several centuries from about the tenth century onwards. There was never a complete 'system' in the sense of a rigid pattern of social relationships conforming to certain definite 'rules'; and, of course, the label used by later historians was quite unknown to men actually living at the time.

Yet without any doubt a type of social structure did exist in these centuries clearly and identifiably different from the social structures of earlier or later periods. It is possible to pin down some of the essentials of feudalism with some such form of words as 'it was a system of social relationships in which inferiors held land of their superiors by virtue of performing some service for their superior; to begin with, for example, knights held land from their lords in return for performing military service.' Thus the word 'feudalism' serves a very useful purpose as a 'label' describing something which is in fact quite complicated. But since the word was not known to the men who actually lived in the period of what we call 'feudalism', clearly there are times when we must handle the word very carefully. For example if we wish to say (and we might, provided we supplied plenty of explanation and qualification): 'The barons objected to Edward I's anti-feudal policies' we would have to remember that to neither Edward I nor to the barons could the word 'anti-feudal' have any meaning, and that, therefore, it might be better to spell out in more detail the exact nature of the policies to which the barons objected.

301 (3) Whenever you are writing a history essay or taking part in a

serious discussion of historical matters switch on the mental red light if you find yourself talking about 'the people'. Ask yourself what exactly you mean. Every single person in a particular country? A majority of them? All of them except the king? All of them except the rich? The working class? Quite probably you are not really sure what you do mean, which, naturally, means that what you are writing or saying is not very good history.

- 302 Whether or not you do know what you mean, a pause for thought is called for. Almost certainly instead of the vague 'the people' you could substitute something more precise such as 'a majority of the people', 'the middle and working classes' and so on.

Another word which lends itself to the same sort of loose usage is 'the masses'.

And of course there is even a good deal of vagueness about phrases like 'the middle classes', 'the working classes', which in fact involve a mixture of problems (1), (2) and (3), but which are probably best discussed here, since we do in fact make extensive use of them in everyday language.

- 303 The phrases 'middle class' and 'working class' (or better, 'middle classes' and 'working classes') came into general use in the early nineteenth century when the 'Industrial Revolution' had created a 'middle class' of people whose wealth was drawn from industry and commerce instead of (as was the case with the aristocracy or 'upper class') from land, and a 'working class' whose sole source of income was from their labour in the industrial factories. In earlier periods people talked, not of classes, but of 'estates' or 'orders' or of someone's 'station in life'. There is no harm in using the phrase 'middle class' for these earlier periods to describe what contemporaries might perhaps refer to as 'the middling sort of people' – merchants, tradesmen, lawyers, such business men as existed – provided it is realised that the phrase was not used by people at the time, and that in different periods the phrase will apply to different sorts of people. One of the great sins in historical writing is to talk of 'The Middle Class' as if it remained the same throughout the centuries. For pre-industrial periods the phrase 'the working class' will probably not be terribly helpful: better to say, 'the peasants', or 'the labourers', or 'the poor'.

- 304 (4) The problem of historical semantics joins up with the problem of periodisation the moment a label is given to a particular period, as in 'The Renaissance' or 'The Enlightenment' (for the eighteenth century). One important question to ask right away is: was the label invented by men at the time, or was it a later invention of historians? Both 'The Renaissance' and 'The Enlightenment' have widespread acceptability because they are phrases which contemporaries actually used. When you come to study Vasari's *Lives of the Artists* you will find that he, writing in the middle of the sixteenth century, actually used the word *rinascita* – rebirth or renaissance. However for him the stress was on the *re*, the rediscovery of the best features of the ancient world, a return to something *old*. A modern historian, on the other hand, still using the word 'Renaissance' would tend to lay stress on the *new* approaches developing in this period, leading to the modern world of science, of individualism, and of independent nation states.

(5 and 6) Problems arising from translation, and 'geographical

abstractions' are less important for the moment. You can read about them in *The Nature of History*, pp. 167–8.

305 When you yourself write a history essay you will find that you have to make use of the phrases discussed above, or others like them. Each time you must be absolutely clear in your own mind what concrete meaning lies behind the phrases you use. There is no point talking about 'the Radicals' or about 'Capitalism' unless you know what, in terms of real historical people, real events and real processes, these phrases signify. Too often, of course, students (and others!) use phrases like these because they think they sound good, without really being clear about their meaning. Remember: if you don't know what you mean, whoever is reading your work won't know what you mean either.

The trick, whenever these phrases come to hand, is to switch on the mental television set, to endeavour to visualise the concrete realities implied in the phrase. If you don't get a picture: drop the phrase.

306 Here is a short check-list of phrases (not already discussed above) which raise questions of historical semantics, with brief guidance as to their usage. It is not necessary to memorise these phrases or the definitions offered: the point is to be aware of the existence of this type of problem and yourself to exercise care in using this sort of phrase.

EMPIRE

This word has generally come to connote an area of territory in which one country or nation exercises power over other countries or nations, though in the Tudor period as you may recall from an extract quoted above (para. 259) the word was simply used to apply to the English nation state. What this means is that the student of Tudor England must exercise caution when he comes across this word in a primary document. Otherwise the modern meaning is fairly clear. Sometimes, however, we get the additional emotional complication, often inseparable from this type of problem, that empire is now often regarded as being rather a bad thing and therefore may be used almost as a term of abuse.

ROMANTICISM

We encountered this concept when we were discussing the appropriate periodisation for Mendelssohn's rediscovery of the music of Bach. Most historians are agreed that towards the end of the eighteenth century a general movement in ideas and the arts began which had certain definite and common characteristics which can reasonably be described as 'romantic'. Included in these characteristics are: (1) a general turning away from formal classical ideals towards a greater emotionalism and freedom of expression; and (2) a turning away from the harsh reality of the contemporary world towards the beauties of nature, or towards an alleged Golden Age in the past, or towards a hoped-for Golden Age in the future.

CAPITALISM

This word has immediate emotional overtones because of its usage by Marxist historians. It can however be used in a fairly neutral way simply to describe a type of economic organization in which

the most important persons are the owners of the capital upon which industry is based (as distinct from the owners of land). G. N. Clark (*Early Modern Europe*, starting on page 72) gives an excellent definition of this word. Note that it takes him over a page to do it.

LAISSEZ-FAIRE

This French phrase was first used in the eighteenth century to describe a policy of freedom from the economic restrictions which had been a characteristic of the medieval and early modern period. It came into general usage in Britain in the nineteenth century to characterise a particular type of social and economic policy which insisted that it was best for the government not to interfere in social and economic matters but to leave such matters to the free operation of private enterprise.

MERCANTILISM

Study the definition given by Clark on page 126.

BOURGEOIS

Again this word tends to figure in Marxist historical writing. Originally meaning 'townsman' it is used most often simply as a synonym for middle class.

INDUSTRIALISATION

The process by which a country's economy becomes dependent on industry rather than agriculture; thus the phrase also implies the change from country life to town life based on the development of industry.

INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

It is usually accepted that this phrase was brought into general usage by Arnold Toynbee lecturing in the 1880s. Although for a time in the 1930s historians tried to do without the phrase it is now equally accepted that it usefully describes an important series of events and relations between events taking place sometime in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century. In a real sense these events had revolutionary implications in that there was a definite and identifiable change in the way of life of the majority of the British people.

Acceptance of the phrase does not of course settle the many other problems of definition implied in it. (See *The Nature of History*, pp. 227-231.)

NONCONFORMISM

We have encountered this phrase once or twice in discussing Dr. Morgan's book. Nonconformism is used to describe the various religious bodies which grew up in Britain outside of the established Church of England.

SOCIALISM

Again socialism can be a slightly emotional word. It was often used in the nineteenth century simply to mean state action in economic and social matters. But in its best usage it implies such action posi-

tively on behalf of the working classes. Thus it implies some kind of philosophy aiming at a reconstruction of society. However, it remains a difficult word in that all sorts of different people who say they believe in socialism turn out to mean all sorts of different things by this phrase. The rule is, as with all of these semantic problems, be sure yourself what you mean, and be sure that your reader knows what you mean. Socialist is no more a synonym for 'working class' than 'radical' is for 'middle class'.

BAROQUE

See what Clark says, pages 150–151.

EXERCISES

Read pages 59–61 inclusive of Sir George Clark's *Early Modern Europe* and list in the spaces provided below the semantic problems which you encounter in these four pages. Use the additional space to write a brief commentary on the problems which you identify.

1

2

3

4

5

every one of the working class. It is a happy one, and it is a philosophy aiming at a reconstruction of society. However, it remains a difficult word in that all sorts of different people who say they believe in socialism turn out to mean all sorts of different things by this phrase. The rule is, as with all of these semantic problems, be sure yourself what you mean, and be sure that your reader knows what you mean. Socialism is no more a synonym for 'working class' than 'radical' is for 'middle class'.

6

Read pages 55-61 inclusive of Sir George Clark's *Early History of the English Language*. In the spaces provided below the semantic problems which you encounter in these four pages. Use the additional space to make a brief commentary on the problems which you identify.

7

8

9

10

11

4 p. 59, 9 lines from foot of page, 'scientists'.
What we call the Scientific Revolution was only taking place in the
seventeenth century. 'Scientists' in the modern sense scarcely yet
existed (the word was only coined in the 1840s); the term 'science',
loosely used, covered a good many activities which we would regard
as distinctly unscientific.

12

5 p. 59, 9 lines from the foot of the page, 'Civilization'.
Civilization is always a tricky word to use and is sometimes employed
rather differently by historians and social anthropologists and by
different historians. The word did not in fact exist in English in the
seventeenth century, although there certainly was a proud conscious-
ness among political and intellectual leaders of what Sir George Clark
means by civilization—high artistic standards and a more elaborate

SPECIMEN ANSWERS

1 p. 59, line 3, 'Europe'.

Europe is an example of a geographical abstraction. There is no real problem here since the idea of Europe was already becoming accepted by the seventeenth century; but note that for the earlier period Europe was not a word in general use.

2 p. 59, 10 lines from foot of page, 'financiers'.

Financiers is a modern word, justifiably used here in short hand fashion by Sir George Clark. The problem is that one must be aware that financiers of the modern Wall Street or City of London type hardly existed in the seventeenth century. Actually when you read page 73, you will find that the author gives an excellent description of the activities of the financiers of this period.

3 p. 59, 9 lines from foot of page, 'industrial workers'.

There was no modern industry in our sense of the word in the seventeenth century, so one can see that the author is on slightly dangerous ground here in talking about industrial workers.

4 p. 59, 9 lines from foot of page, 'scientists'.

What we call the Scientific Revolution was only taking place in the seventeenth century. 'Scientists' in the modern sense scarcely yet existed (the word was only coined in the 1840s); the term 'science', loosely used, covered a good many activities which we would regard as distinctly unscientific.

5 p. 59, 5 lines from the foot of the page, 'Civilisation'.

Civilisation is always a tricky word to use and is sometimes employed rather differently by historians and social anthropologists and by different historians. The word did not in fact exist in English in the seventeenth century, although there certainly was a proud consciousness among political and intellectual leaders of what Sir George Clark means by civilisation – high artistic standards and a more elaborate manner of life, one of the definitions given in the very first unit of the Foundation Course.

6 p. 60, line 3, 'Islam'.

Islam means the religion whose founder and prophet was Muhammed, but is used here to imply also the military power used to support and extend this religion.

7 p. 60, line 14, 'Sherifian Empire.'

An independent Islamic Empire established in North Africa.

8 p. 60, line 20, 'Henry the Navigator'.

History abounds in these easily-remembered labels pinned on to famous people; it is important to be sure whether these names were coined during the person's own lifetime or whether they were invented by historians later. This label was in fact invented later by English historians. Arguably it is not a very good label since, although he did take part in a naval battle, Henry never went to sea in any of the Portuguese commercial voyages of the time.



Fig. 1 Henry the Navigator

9 p. 60, 7 lines from the foot of the page, 'slaves'.

The original Latin word *servus* gave rise to the medieval European word *serf*. The word *slave* was developed from *slav*, the title of an East European racial group. There can in fact be a tremendous range of meaning covered by the words *serf* and *slave*. (See *The Nature of History*, p. 167.)

10 p. 61, line 5, 'feudal'.

No comment!

11 p. 61, line 11, 'colonisation'.

Colonisation can mean simply taking over and developing empty territory, sometimes within one's own country. Nowadays it tends to have slightly invidious overtones, being associated with European dominance of the rest of the world (though here the much stronger word 'imperialism' can be used). Note, however, that Sir George Clark actually speaks of 'the first great experiment in colonisation', seeing colonisation as a praiseworthy human activity.

12 p. 61, line 14, 'Middle Ages'.

Remember what we said when talking about periodisation.

13 p. 61, line 25, 'absolute monarchs'.

This phrase has almost become a technical term, implying a particular type of monarch with absolute power, as distinct from a limited monarch or constitutional monarch, who is dependent on the counsel, and, sometimes, the good will of others. Again the author later (pp. 132-133) supplies an excellent description of 'absolutism'.

Apart from these thirteen semantic problems, you may also have noted 'geographical research-station', which is again a rather modern phrase, but whose use here is justified by Sir George Clark's qualifying clause, 'what may be called . . .'. 'Bulls' (papal promulgations) and 'pagans' (non-Christians) are both technical terms, which you may also have thought worthy of attention.

There is one semantic problem which the author dodges neatly at the top of page 60 when he talks about 'Spaniards', but never about 'Spain'. 'Spain' derives from the original Roman word; yet there was still no national state of Spain (though there was Castile). The problem is very similar to that involved in the use of 'Great Britain', discussed in *The Nature of History*, p. 168.

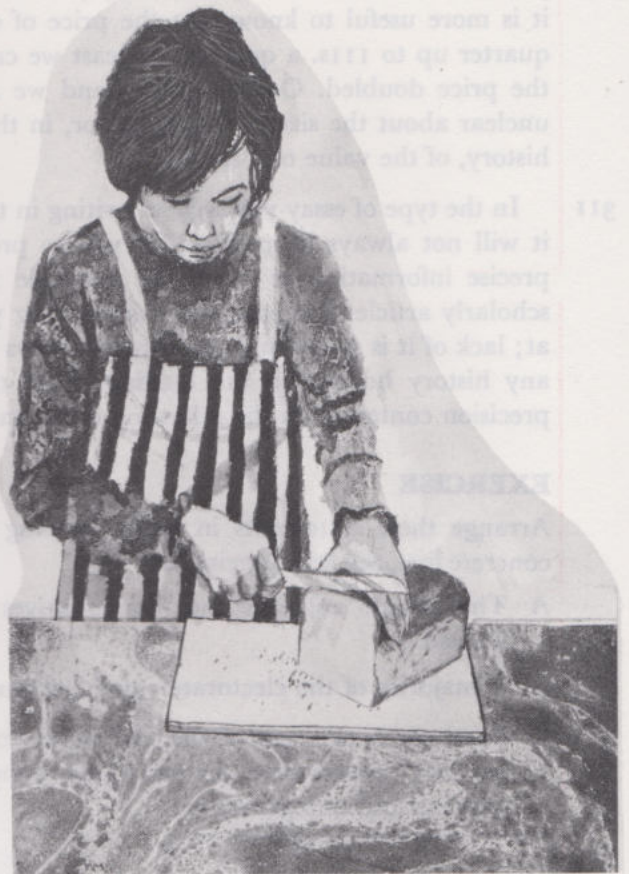


Fig. 2 Artist's representation of a quartern loaf

- 307 Do not worry too much about this, but do be aware that these problems exist. In history you cannot just shuffle labels around as you might shuffle a pack of cards.

40.2 The Need to be Concrete and Precise in Historical Writing

- 308 Our discussion of historical semantics showed how easy it is in historical writing to produce vague phrases which lack any clear and definite meaning. And the main point of that discussion was to drive home the point that in writing history you must always be as clear and definite as you can, you must avoid what is sometimes called 'waffle'. You must be **concrete** and **precise**.
- 309 When we say that some article, or person or event that you are describing is *concrete*, we mean that you have described it with such clarity that we can practically visualise, perhaps almost touch it, in our own minds. You do not talk about a rise in the price of the quartern loaf at the beginning of the nineteenth century (as too many historians do) until you have made it clear how big a quartern loaf was. It was in fact 4lb. 5½oz. – more than twice the size of the ordinary loaf of today. Thus instead of having meaningless figures about food costs in the early nineteenth century we are brought nearer to the concrete reality of what it was like to live in the early nineteenth century.
- 310 Giving the exact size of the quartern loaf, too, brings in a desired element of precision. We achieve precision when we give exact (or as near exact as possible) quantities – provided we know in the first place what the quantities mean. Rather than be told that 'the

price of corn fluctuated' (which simply means 'went up and down') it is more useful to know that the price of corn went from 55s. a quarter up to 111s. a quarter. At least we can see at a glance that the price doubled. On the other hand we are probably left very unclear about the size of a quarter, or, in this particular period of history, of the value of a shilling.

- 311 In the type of essay you will be writing in this Foundation Course it will not always be possible for you to provide anything like as precise information as would be desirable if you were writing a scholarly article. But precision is something you should always aim at; lack of it is something you should always be ready to criticise in any history books you are reading. Note the varying degrees of precision contained in the following three statements.

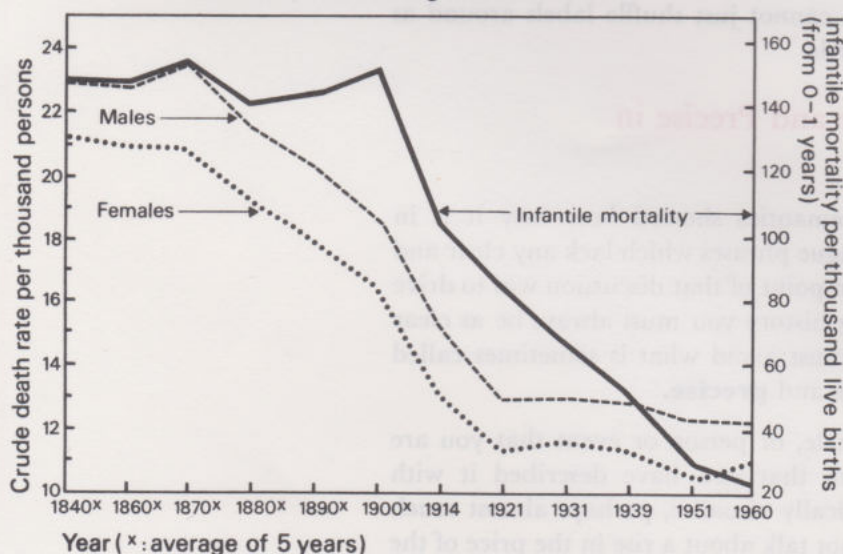
EXERCISE

Arrange these statements in order, placing the most precise and concrete first, the least precise last.

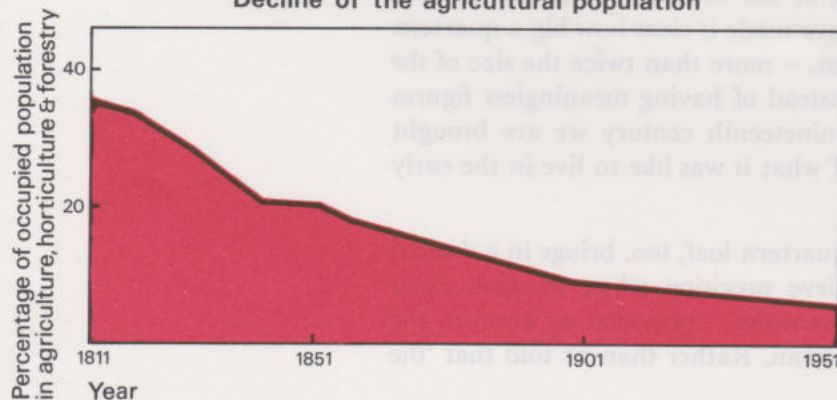
- A The people rejected the Conservatives and elected Labour instead.
- B A majority of the electorate voted Labour.
- C Forty-seven per cent of the electorate voted Labour, forty-five per cent Conservative, the remainder of the votes being shared by Liberals and Independents.

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Mortality rates, England and Wales



Decline of the agricultural population



Diagrams like these are often helpful in making things concrete and precise. (Figs. 3a and b)

ANSWER

C	B	A
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The third, clearly, is better than the second, and the second better than the first (because in each case, more precise). Remember also what has been said above (para. 301) about the confusion involved in using the phrase 'the people'.

- 312 In any general history of European overseas expansion in the period since the Renaissance you will meet frequent reference to the trade in indigo. Less frequently will you have it explained that indigo was a blue dye extracted from a plant which grows in the Pacific islands, and that its immense importance derives from the fact that it was practically the only source for ink as well as for dye. Without this concrete information indigo simply becomes another item to be memorised in the boring rota of historical facts.

Any history of British overseas expansion will stress the way in which in the eighteenth century Britain secured log-wood cutting rights in the Panama area from the Spanish. But again a somewhat empty, and perhaps misleading piece of information, till you are aware of the concrete detail that log-wood was used as a source of red dye.

These two items, taken together, might incidentally stress the significance in human history of man's need for colour.

- 313 This whole question of the concrete and the precise has been admirably summed up by a distinguished history professor, Denys Hay (see *The Nature of History*, pp. 168-70).

The hall-mark of the historically-minded person is an itch for the concrete; a desire to get behind generalisations to the facts upon which they are based and to establish an almost physical relationship with the texture of earlier times.

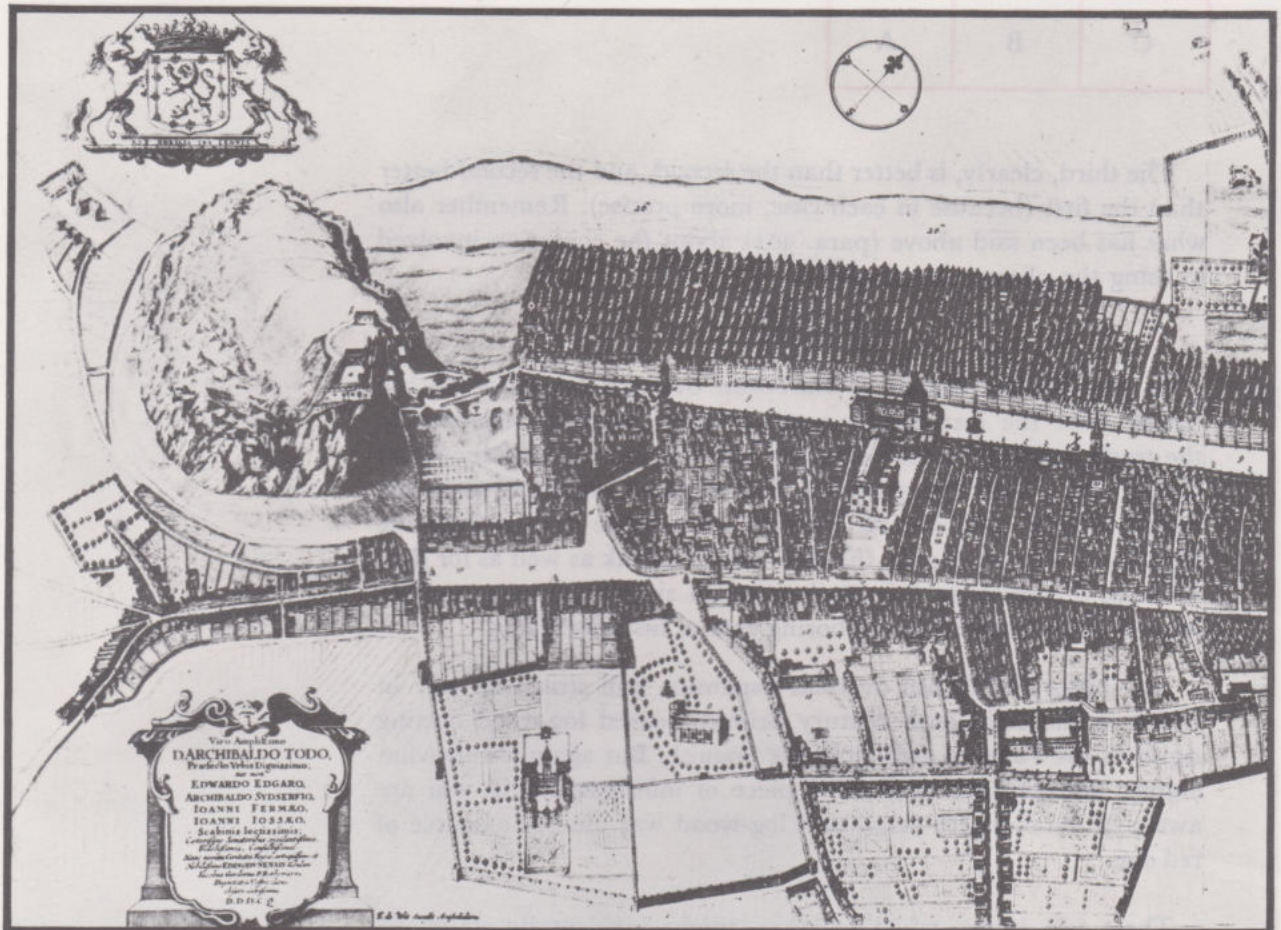
For the moment it will not be easy for you to establish this 'almost physical relationship with the texture of earlier times' since you will not be working in the primary materials which above all enable the historian to feel what the past was like. But you can get near to it by giving particular attention to illustrations of what things looked like in the past, to maps and to exact statistics, and by keeping in the back of your mind all the time the range of primary sources which we discussed last week.

EXERCISES

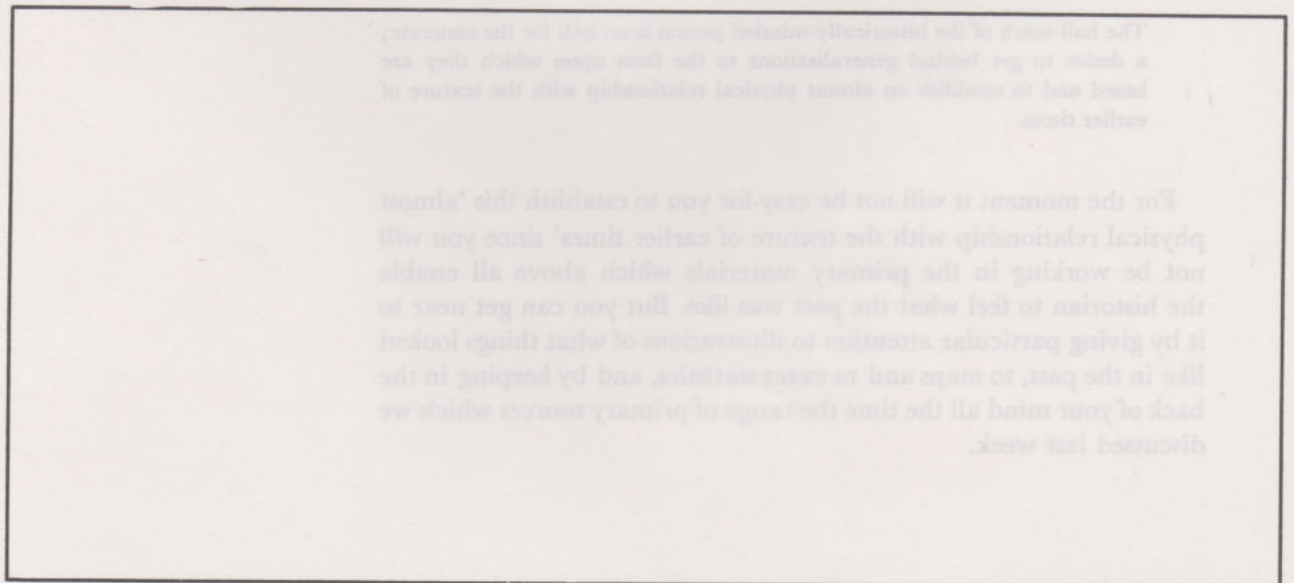
All of these exercises are designed to test and stimulate the visual side of your historical appreciation (an important element in the general question of the concrete in history).

1 Study this seventeenth century map of Edinburgh.

Fig. 4



What basic conclusion can you draw from it about population conditions in Edinburgh in the seventeenth century?



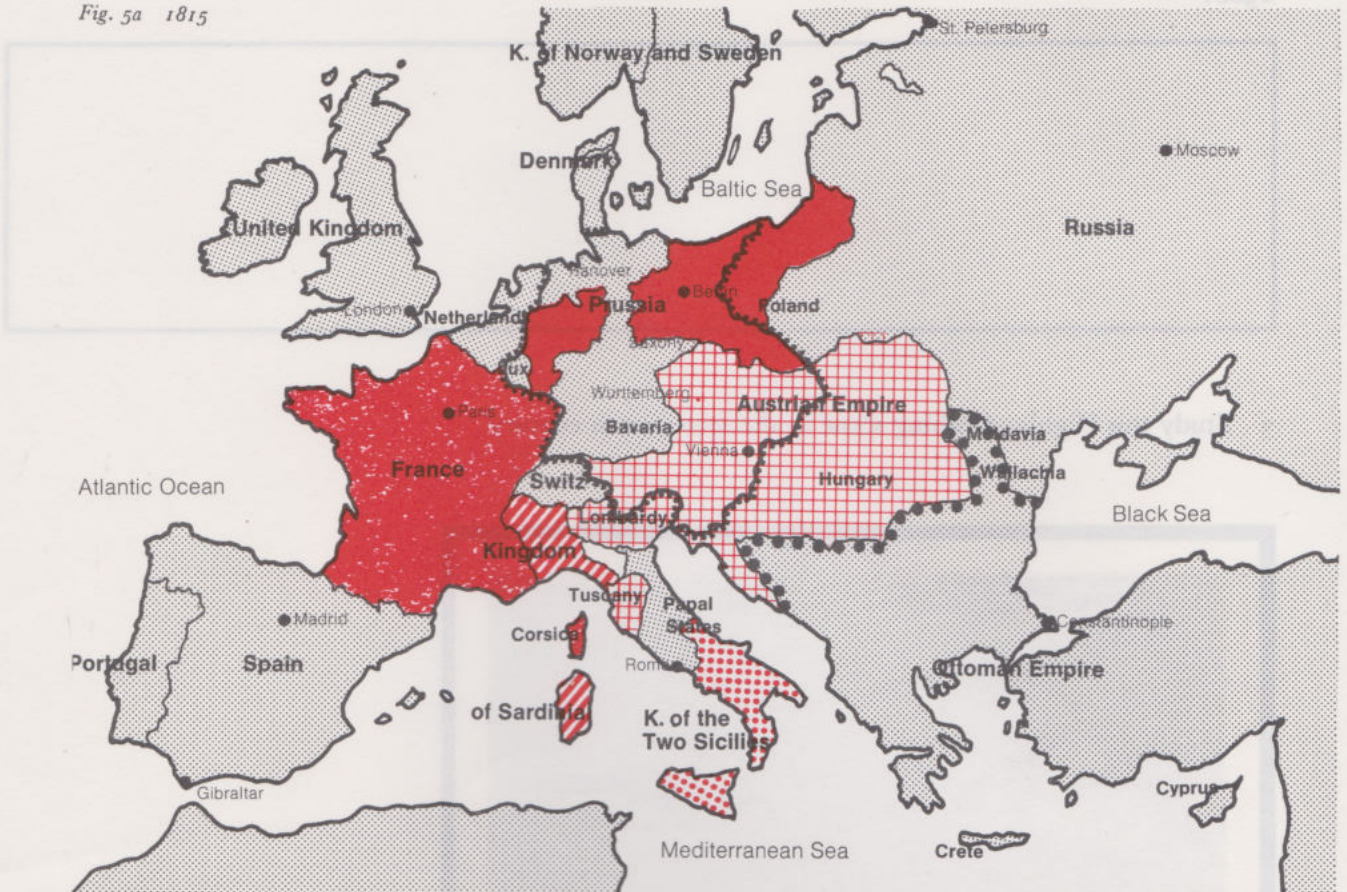
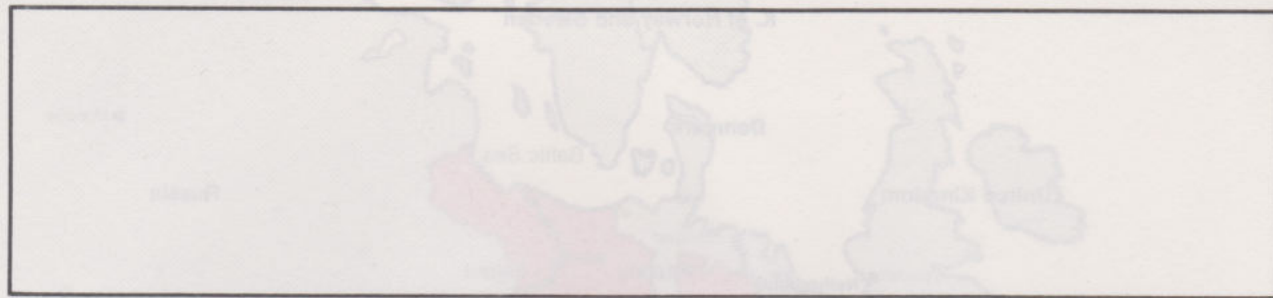


Fig. 5b 1900



What basic political changes have taken place between 1815 and 1900?



3 Study this Highland fishing scene in the seventeenth century.



Fig. 6

What conclusions do you draw about the role of women in a Highland fishing community in the seventeenth century?

SPECIMEN ANSWERS

- 1 Even in the seventeenth century the population of Edinburgh was extremely overcrowded.

- 2 In the second map there is
 - (a) a consolidated united Germany,
 - (b) a consolidated united Italy,
 - (c) an independent and separate Norway and Sweden,
 - (d) a slightly smaller Empire, now named Austria-Hungary,
 - (e) a smaller Ottoman Empire with an independent Rumania, Bulgaria, Serbia and Greece,
 - (f) an independent Belgium separated from the Netherlands,
 - (g) evidence of French imperial conquests in North Africa (Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia).

If you have noted other changes – congratulations.

- 3 Women, seen here carrying their menfolk, were obviously regarded as a kind of beast of burden.

40.3 The Reasons for Controversy in Historical Writing

- 314 There are many famous controversies in history. 'Why did the American colonists rebel against the British Government?' 'What exactly was the Renaissance and when did it take place?' 'Did the Industrial Revolution raise or lower the standard of living of the majority of the British people?' 'What were the causes of the English Civil War in the seventeenth century?' 'What were the causes of the Second World War in the twentieth century?' 'Who killed the Princes in the Tower?'
- 315 Historians do disagree with each other. But then so, sometimes, do scientists. We must accept that all historical writing is in the end *interpretation*, that it must contain a subjective element (above 10.4). But this does not mean that 'one opinion is as good as another'. When you are reading a story you must be always on guard against the crank or charlatan who claims to be putting forward a startling and imaginative new interpretation. If he has not observed the principles of scholarship outlined in this four-week 'Introduction to History' then you have every right to reject his claims.
- 316 Similarly with your own writing. Imagination, the ability to penetrate behind the facts to the connections between them, is expected of you in any essay you write in humanities, but in a history essay you must be guided first of all by the information you have acquired from your various sources. There is all the difference in the world between creative historical *imagination* and sheer *invention* (that is, in this connection, simply making things up).
- 317 Two students, equally conscientious, equally able, may write entirely different essays on the same subject. Yet if both students have observed the basic principles of historical writing, both essays may be equally good. (It should be added that at student level the probability is that one essay will probably be more in accordance with historical reality as accepted by the leading historical authorities, and thus better as history). Two historians, equally scholarly, may also present different conclusions on the same subject (as in the subjects listed in para. 314).
- 318 From what has already been said in this 'Introduction to History' the reasons for this should be clear to you. Let us list these reasons in the order in which they have come up so far:
- 1 History is always in some sense 'a dialogue between present and past' – every age rewrites history to take account of its own current preoccupations (10.4) – thus a historian writing in 1970 will tend to present a different account from a historian writing in 1927.
 - 2 The individual historian may believe to a greater or lesser degree in the possibility of establishing an underlying pattern of historical events. He may in general have a Marxist or a positivist outlook (see above 10.6). He may believe in the possibility of building a 'model' for the discussion of such topics as industrialisation (see discussion of Professor Flinn's 'model' in *The Nature of History*, pp. 230–31). On the other hand he may believe that 'things happen because they happen'; that history is just 'one damn thing after another'.

- 3 Greater or lesser use of modern 'scientific' techniques – e.g. statistics – can yield different conclusions.
- 4 The primary sources upon which history is based are usually fragmentary and imperfect and frequently conflict with each other so that historians studying the same evidence can still genuinely arrive at conflicting conclusions (20.6).
- 5 In the modern period the sources are so extensive that it may not be possible to consult all of them: different historians may consult different selections.
- 6 Even in other periods different historians may pay attention to different ranges of sources. Some historians might, for instance, pay little attention to place names or aerial photography.

To this list we can add further common-sense reasons for controversy and disagreement among historians:

- 7 Personality differences. One historian may tend to see human actions in an optimistic light, another in an entirely pessimistic light. For example, the first type of historian might present religion as a source of great inspiration to mankind, another might present it as simply a cause of bloodshed and atrocity.
- 8 A further related personality difference affecting historical writing is that between those who stress the importance of ideas in historical development, and those who stress economics. This difference might, for example, lead a historian of the first type to explain the American Revolution as a struggle for liberty, while a historian of the second type might represent the Revolution as basically a plot on the part of American merchants to feather their own nests.
- 9 Political differences. A socialist, for example, may instinctively incline to the view that the industrial revolution had an adverse effect on the standard of living of the working classes, whereas a conservative might tend to take the opposite view, springing to the defence of the capitalist employers of the day.

EXERCISE

These nine reasons for the existence of controversy and disagreement among historians have simply been listed in the order in which they happen to have come up in this course so far. Some of them are better reasons than others; some may sound more like excuses than unavoidable reasons. The test here is to list these reasons (putting the appropriate numbers in the boxes provided below) in order of importance – that is, put first the one you think is the most convincing and justifiable reason, and last the one you think weakest and least justifiable.

1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	



Fig. 7 Remains of Roman ship from Blackfriars, London, also showing part of stone cargo.

SPECIMEN ANSWER

1 4	2 1	3 7	4 8	5 9
6 2	7 5	8 6	9 3	

DISCUSSION

319 To my mind 4 should quite definitely go first. One of the most fundamental problems in history is the imperfect and conflicting nature of historical evidence. This is not the fault of the historian, so obviously this is the best of all reasons for disagreement among historians. You might at first glance be tempted to put 1 first, but on reflection you will realise that this cannot explain controversy between historians living in the *same* age. According to a certain philosophical school which maintains that we all see things differently 7 ought to go first. But I don't myself believe that personality differences can reasonably account for the *actual* controversies that do arise among historians – though they contribute to them.

320 I think 1 should go second. No historian can escape completely from the preoccupations and prejudices of the society in which he lives; we must apply to him, as to the artist and philosopher, all our arguments about the historical context (above 30.6). We expect him to try as hard as he can to overcome this limitation (which, unlike the imperfections of the primary sources, he can do *something* about), that is why this reason goes second, not first.

321 6 and 3 should definitely go last – 3 before 6 if you like, since there's not much in it. They go last because the serious historian really does have an obligation to consult all the sources and to use all available techniques. It may be, of course, that a new technique, or a new range of sources, has just been discovered. We cannot fault a historian who has expressed his views prior to these discoveries; but we can fault him if he goes on sticking to his old views without any attempt to take the new evidence and the new methods into account.

5 is rather the same case as 6 and 3, though definitely more defensible. Undoubtedly in some areas of recent history the historian can only consult a selection of the sources. However if fundamental disagreement arises between two historians because they have made rather different selections from the available sources, this does suggest that one of them, or perhaps both, has not been very competent in his selections, and thus is not a very good historian.

322 7, 8, 9 and 2 are all rather similar to each other, being reasons arising from the historian's own personal outlook. The order doesn't matter, but you should have realised that they go in the middle – they are not as unavoidable as 4 and 1, but they are not as weak as 3 and 6. We can expect the historian to do the extra work needed to overcome 3 and 6, but we can't really expect him to completely overcome his own personal outlook on life.

I have arranged these reasons in the order given because it seems to me that the difference between the optimist and the pessimist really is a basic one which the historian himself can do little about. This is quite different from political differences: Ranke was optimistic, Burckhardt pessimistic; both were extremely conservative (see *The Nature of History*, p. 39). Of course there are all sorts of other much more subtle kinds of personality difference. But it seems to me that the more subtle they are, the less likely they are to influence the substantial controversies which historians engage in.

8 is almost equally basic, but to the extent that it implies a more conscious, thought-out approach to historical problems, it is more open to correction by an effort on the part of the historian concerned.

9 The argument advanced in regard to 8 applies even more strongly to political bias. Certainly there is no excuse for history which is simply political propaganda. On the other hand since bias is almost bound to exist, it is better that it should be open. Furthermore it is frequently the element of political involvement which provides the vital impetus to a piece of historical writing: the historian who tries to be totally neutral is liable to write a thoroughly boring piece of history.

2 is a tricky one. It might well be ranked with 7 and 8 on the grounds that the historian is quite entitled to have a natural belief in patterns of historical development, or in the absence of patterns. However I have put 2 last in this little group because I think that both the man who writes history as 'one damn thing after another' without any explanatory interconnections, and the man whose belief in general patterns is so strong that he fits the facts to the pattern instead of allowing the patterns to emerge from the facts, are bad historians.

- 323 Two final reflections on the reasons for historical controversy. Sometimes historians do express their interpretation of a particular subject in rather more extreme terms than their own reading of the evidence would really allow for; there is, let us say, a natural tendency to make one's own point of view stand out as strongly as possible in contrast to one's predecessors and opponents. Likewise historians sometimes also form a personal emotional attachment to their own side of the argument – and so find it difficult to see the other point of view.

40.4 The Value of Historical Controversy

- 324 Controversy is a strong word. It implies more than just differences of interpretation among various historians. Rather it suggests that there are two or more schools of thought ranged against each other over the interpretation of a particular historical episode. There may be, as we noted at the end of 40.3, a strong tendency for the participants to express their views in a particularly strong way.

Disagreement, different opinions, we have seen, are inevitable. But should not historians play down their differences, instead of indulging in vigorous controversy of a type which sometimes verges upon personal attack?

- 325 In fact argument and debate, properly conducted, serve a valuable purpose in all academic disciplines, history included. Historical controversy contributes, in three main ways, to historical truth:

- 1 It can open up new lines of enquiry. The historian who has researched deeply into some problem can become blinded to the existence of wider perspectives and alternative lines of enquiry as he delves ever deeper into his subject. If his interpretations are boldly attacked by other historians then he will be forced to defend himself and to give consideration to the alternative interpretations forced upon him in the controversy. Out of all this the total sum of historical knowledge may be significantly increased.
- 2 It can lead to the critical testing of a particular generalisation or hypothesis. Just as the detailed researcher can become blinded by his researches, so too the historian who has formulated sweep-

ing generalisations or bold hypotheses can fall in love with his own theories and forget that every general formulation must be constantly re-examined in the light of new evidence. Controversy with another historian will force him to undertake this re-examination. Again the cause of historical truth may be advanced.

- 3 It can lead to new synthesis. An historical controversy may take the form of one hypothesis being posed against another. It may be that the historians concerned dig in their heels and refuse to modify their own hypothesis. Even so, a clear sharp statement of the conflicting theories may make it possible for other historians to present a *synthesis* which combines the best of each hypothesis, and in fact marks a definite advance towards historical truth.

A number of problems or controversies in history are discussed in chapter VII of *The Nature of History*. You can see there how in some cases controversy has led to a general advance in historical knowledge.

EXERCISE 1

The passage quoted below is a rather extreme statement about the effects of the Industrial Revolution which today most historians would not accept without some qualification.

Rome imported slaves to work in Italy: Englishmen counted it one of the advantages of the slave trade that it discouraged the competition of British colonists with British manufacturers . . .

Yet England did not escape the penalty. For it was under this shadow that the new industrial system took form and grew, and the immense power with which invention had armed mankind was exercised at first under conditions that reproduced the degradation of the slave trade . . .

In adapting this new power to the satisfaction of its wants England could not escape from the moral atmosphere of the slave trade: the atmosphere in which it was the fashion to think of men as things . . .

In the early nineteenth century the workers, as a class, were looked upon as so much labour power to be used at the discretion of, and under conditions imposed by, their masters; not as men and women who are entitled to some voice in the arrangements of their life and work . . .

The needs of the London workhouses on the one hand, and those of the factory on the other, created a situation painfully like the situation in the West Indies. The Spanish employers in America wanted outside labour, because the supply of native labour was deficient in quantity and quality. The new cotton mills placed on streams in solitary districts were in the same case. The inventions had found immense scope for child labour, and in these districts there were only scattered populations. In the workhouses of large towns there was a quantity of child labour available for employment, that was even more powerless and passive in the hands of a master than the stolen negro, brought from his burning home to the hold of a British slave ship. Of these children it could be said, as it was said of the negroes, that their life at best was a hard one, and that their choice was often the choice between one kind of slavery and another. So the new industry which was to give the English people such immense power in the world borrowed at its origin from the methods of the American settlements.

- (a) Thinking back to what was said in 40.3, briefly set down below any obvious subjective influences you detect in this passage:

- (b) Yet, just because this passage is phrased so strongly it does clearly open up one rather interesting and possibly fruitful line of enquiry. What is that? (Answer in space below.)

EXERCISE 2

Now read this passage which presents a rather different interpretation of the Industrial Revolution.

... It was through such changing seas that the captains of the industrial revolution steered their courses. Many of the difficulties they encountered were, it is clear, of their own making. Some of the navigators were unable to distinguish a false wind from a true, and not all knew when it was safe to clap on sail, or prudent to shorten it. Not all, again, took sufficient thought of the state of their crews: pioneers have often suffered disaster by reason of this. But the major troubles arose, not from want of skill or want of heart – certainly not from want of courage – but from the forces of Nature and the currents of political change. If harvests had been uniformly good; if statesmen had directed their attention to providing a stable standard of value and a proper medium of exchange; if there had been no wars to force up prices, raise rates of interest, and turn resources to destruction, the course of the industrial revolution would have been smoother, and its consequences would not have been, as they are, in dispute ...

An historian has written of 'the disasters of the industrial revolution.' If by this he means that the years 1760–1830 were darkened by wars and made cheerless by dearth, no objection can be made to the phrase. But if he means that the technical and economic changes were themselves the source of calamity the opinion is surely perverse. The central problem of the age was how to feed and clothe and employ generations of children outnumbering by far those of any earlier time. Ireland was faced by the same problem. Failing to solve it, she lost in the forties about a fifth of her people by emigration or starvation and disease. If England had remained a nation of cultivators and craftsmen, she could hardly have escaped the same fate, and, at best, the weight of a growing population must have pressed down the spring of her spirit. She was delivered, not by her rulers, but by those who, seeking no doubt their own narrow ends, had the wit and resource to devise new instruments of production and new methods of administering industry. There are today on the plains of India and China men and women, plague-ridden and hungry, living lives little better, to outward appearance, than those of the cattle that toil with them by day and share their places of sleep by night. Such Asiatic standards, and such unmechanised horrors, are the lot of those who increase their numbers without passing through an industrial revolution.

(a) What subjective influences do you detect here?

SPECIMEN ANSWERS

(a) The author clearly has very deep sympathy for the 'workers' and strong hostility to the 'masters'. In fact this is a passage from a book by J. L. and B. Hammond (see *The Nature of History*, pp. 64 and 228).

(b) In the space provided below write a *synthesis* of these two passages, including what seem to you the best points made in each passage. 100–200 words will suffice.

Note: this exercise is designed purely to give you practice in writing, and, more important, to bring out the point that something positive can emerge from two opposed historical interpretations. It should be emphasised however that in writing a complete history essay it is not generally a good idea to try to balance out two opposed points of view: there are times when you will have to come down on one side or another, or establish a special point of view of your own. See the criticism quoted in *The Nature of History*, p. 240, of conventional history teaching at the older universities where the subject is learned 'by writing essays which marshal existing views and doctrine into a balanced summary and judgement.'

(b) Unimproved conditions were basic for the majority of the British people during the early years of industrialisation. Some employers were merciful and quite happy to restrict what the Hammond's have called 'the cruel atmosphere of the slave market; the atmosphere in which it was the custom to treat of men as things. Children were transported from the playground of their towns to the cotton areas where cotton mills were being built. Yet not all the suffering was caused directly by the employers' greed and destruction. It was caused too by the long period of wars with France, and by an unfortunate series of bad harvests. Arguably the majority of the British people, in a time of rapidly rising population, would have been much worse off had there been no industrial revolution to provide new sources of employment, food and clothing.

DISCUSSION

To build up this synthesis all I have done is to pick out what seem to be the most impressive points made by each writer, along with the one point (first sentence) which clearly connects them both together.

SPECIMEN ANSWERS

- 1 (a) The author clearly has very deep sympathy for the 'workers' and strong hostility to the 'masters'.

In fact this is a passage from a book by J. L. and B. Hammond (see *The Nature of History*, pp. 64 and 228).

- (b) Apart from the broader point, made of course by many other historians, but driven home with great force here, that conditions during the industrial revolution *were* terrible, this passage suggests as a fruitful line of enquiry the connection between attitudes fostered by the slave trade and the tolerance of such bad conditions during the Industrial Revolution.

- 2 (a) Clearly the author is very much on the side of the employers. In his references at the end to India and China he seems just as emotional as the Hammonds. He is in fact T. S. Ashton (see *The Nature of History*, pp. 230-31).

- (b) Undoubtedly conditions were harsh for the majority of the British people during the early stages of industrialisation. Some employers were uncaring and quite happy to recreate what the Hammonds have called 'the moral atmosphere of the slave trade: the atmosphere in which it was the fashion to think of men as things'. Children were transported from the workhouses of large towns to the remote areas where cotton mills were being built. Yet not all the suffering was caused directly by the employers: dearth and destruction were caused too by the long period of wars with France, and by an unfortunate series of bad harvests. Arguably the majority of the British people, in a time of rapidly rising population, would have been much worse off had there been no industrial revolution to provide new sources of employment, food and clothing.

DISCUSSION

To build up this synthesis all I have done is to pick out what seem to be the most impressive points made by each writer, along with the one point (first sentence) which clearly emerges from both accounts:

whatever the reasons, conditions undoubtedly were pretty harsh. The other points are:

- 1 **From Ashton:** Some employers were uncaring (Ashton puts it in rather elaborate metaphorical style, suggesting perhaps that deep-down he feels he is on rather weak ground here: 'not all took sufficient thought of the state of their crews').
- 2 **From the Hammonds:** these employers anyway (though the Hammonds clearly thought them a majority) accepted the 'moral atmosphere of the slave trade' – strong words so best quoted directly; remember anyway you must avoid the sin of plagiarism.
- 3 **From the Hammonds:** Children transported from workhouses to cotton mills.
- 4 **From Ashton:** Effects of war and bad harvests must be taken into account as well.
- 5 **Ashton's final point:** On balance, because of rising population, it is just as well that the Industrial Revolution did take place.

The final product is a fairly balanced account, which does not gloss over the obvious evils as Ashton tends to do; but which equally recognises the achievements of the Industrial Revolution which the Hammonds rather ignore.

326 The Hammonds were writing before and just after the First World War; Ashton was writing before and just after the Second World War. Till the middle fifties the views put forward by Ashton, Clapham and others (see *The Nature of History*, pp. 228–29) tended to be dominant. More recently, however, historians with working-class sympathies, in particular Professor E. J. Hobsbawm, have reopened the debate. One of the most famous of all historical controversies in recent years has been that between Professor Hobsbawm, and Dr. R. M. Hartwell, who took up the challenge from the more conservative position formerly occupied by Ashton and Clapham.

327 You will not be able to follow all the arguments and technicalities presented by these two distinguished historians, but to give you some sort of idea of what an academic controversy in the learned journals look like, we are reproducing here the pages from the *Economic History Review* in which Professor Hobsbawm and Dr. Hartwell fought out this controversy. Note that we shall be returning to this question of the standard of living later on in the course when we come to 'Industrialisation and Culture'. Meantime note also that our radio programme this week is based on the Hobsbawm – Hartwell controversy.

The Standard of Living during The Industrial Revolution: A Discussion*

I By E. J. Hobsbawm

I

The debate on the British people's standard of living in the early industrial period, which had for some time been dormant, was revived in the later 1950s and has continued briskly ever since.¹ To be more precise, what had established itself as a virtual academic orthodoxy in Britain, the optimistic view associated with Sir John Clapham and T. S. Ashton, was sharply challenged, and a number of students have since attempted to rebut or to come to terms with this challenge. The debate has perhaps continued long enough for one of the challengers to survey the battlefield, which is less confused than a casual reading of the relevant literature might suggest. This is the object of the present article.²

The first point which should be clearly established, for it is in danger of being obscured, is that the traditional Clapham-Ashton view has been dislodged almost without resistance. That view was perfectly plain. It argued that the living standards of most of the British labouring population, so far from declining or even remaining stable, improved *substantially* in the period roughly describable as 'the first half of the 19th century'.³ By 'living standards' the proponents of this view understood mainly real income, though they also considered a number of other factors. They believed that this improvement in real income could be statistically demonstrated (and not merely inferred) by some form or other of real wage index. In view of what they believed to be a demonstrable and substantial increase in real wages, they therefore held that the traditional case for a deterioration in labour conditions, which rested largely on non-quantitative evidence, must fall to the ground. There was nothing tentative about these claims. 'Wages', Clapham stated, 'had risen markedly'.⁴ 'In 1831', said Ashton (while admitting that in the thirties and forties wages were lower than might have been expected) 'the cost of living was 11% higher than in 1790, but over



Fig. 8 E. J. Hobsbawm

* *Economic History Review*, Vol. 16, August 1963, pp. 119-34.

¹ D. Woodruff, 'Capitalism and the Historians' (*Journ. Econ. Hist.* XVI 1956, 1), E. J. Hobsbawm, 'The British Standard of Living 1790-1850' (*Econ. Hist. Rev.* 2nd ser. X, 1, 1957), S. Pollard, 'Investment, Consumption and the Industrial Revolution' (*Econ. Hist. Rev.* 2nd ser. XI, 2, 1958), R. M. Hartwell, 'Interpretations of the Industrial Revolution in England' (*Journ. Econ. Hist.* 1959), A. J. Taylor, 'Progress and Poverty in Britain 1780-1850' (*History*, XLV, Feb. 1960), R. M. Hartwell, 'The Rising Standard of Living in England 1800-1850' (*Econ. Hist. Rev.* XIII, 3, 1961) are the chief contributions so far. They will be quoted as Woodruff, Hobsbawm, Pollard, Taylor, Hartwell 1 and Hartwell 2. See also W. H. Chaloner, *The Hungry Forties* (Historical Association, Aids for Teachers, Series I, 1957).

² Since, in the course of the discussion, a number of criticisms have been made of my own contribution to it (Hartwell 2, 398 and elsewhere), it will be necessary from time to time to descend to the minutiae of controversy which, however important, tend to fatigue the uninvolved reader. I shall confine these so far as possible to footnotes.

³ I omit Ireland, for nobody has seriously argued that there was any improvement in that unhappy country. This omission automatically favours the optimists, for it may legitimately be held that Irish conditions are as much part of the general situation in the United Kingdom as, say, Sicilian ones are of the general situation in Italy; or as Welsh and Scottish ones were. Though Taylor, pp. 29-30, suggests otherwise, I had in fact omitted Ireland from my argument, though not the conditions of Irish labourers in Britain. If we include Ireland in our problem, then Hartwell's point (2, p. 400) that the Irish probably improved their condition by migrating to Britain, stands; but then we must also include the Great Famine. If we exclude Ireland, then the putative improvement of the immigrants is neither here nor there.

⁴ *Economic History of Modern Britain*, I, p. 561.

this span of time urban real wages had increased by 43%.¹ The deteriorationist view was flatly described as 'a legend'.²

This brash view is now dead. Even Dr. Hartwell, the most militant, though not the most expert, proponent of amelioration, appears to agree that Clapham must be exiled among the 'extremists'.³ Less committed observers who survey the trend of the discussion have abandoned the optimistic view in its hitherto prevalent form entirely, while not thereby committing themselves to the pessimistic one: 'The conclusions to be drawn, therefore, from the evidence on food consumption are by no means clearly defined: but their general tenor is to suggest rising living standards towards the end of the eighteenth century and less certain progress or decline thereafter.'⁴

I would not wish to quarrel with such caution. If the view that there was substantial improvement is no longer tenable in the present state of evidence, the opposite view that there was substantial, or any, deterioration, has not been firmly established; nor indeed was it the purpose of anyone engaged in this phase of the debate to do so. The object was rather to eliminate 'Claphamism' and thereby to show that the onus of proving that the gloomy and traditional views were wrong, continues to rest squarely on the optimists.⁵ The case for some deterioration is plausible for the period from the middle 1790s to the early or middle 1840s, but in the absence of some evidence which might well upset it (for instance, figures for per capita meat consumption in the provinces analogous to those we have for London), it remains no more than plausible. Very possibly the absence of evidence will never allow us to settle the matter conclusively, and the argument that real incomes remained roughly stable will commend itself as the most acceptable formula.⁶ What is untenable at present is the view that there was substantial improvement, if the word 'substantial' is to have the same meaning before the middle 1840s as after.

The debate since 1957 has produced amazingly little in the way of new evidence. It is therefore relatively easy to summarize the state of the question in a few propositions. They are as follows:

- 1 We cannot at present derive a satisfactory and representative real wage index for our period. The attempt to do so has been for the moment abandoned by the chief proponents of the Clapham school⁷ and even Dr. Hartwell makes no serious effort to revive it. Consequently the view that real wages rose markedly during our period is not now based on reliable evidence.
- 2 The most fruitful way of getting at real wages is probably through the study of actual consumption; certainly this is least likely to

¹ *The Industrial Revolution*, pp. 158, 159.

² W. H. Chaloner and W. O. Henderson, Introduction to Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1958 ed.), p. xiv.

³ Hartwell, 2, p. 397.

⁴ Taylor, p. 22.

⁵ For this reason Hartwell 2, p. 398, is wrong to claim that my article was 'a vigorous plea for deterioration'. It deliberately went no further than to argue that 'the plausibility of, and the evidence for, deterioration are not to be lightly dismissed' and to show that they *had* been lightly dismissed. In other words, my purpose was to reopen a question long and mistakenly regarded as virtually closed.

⁶ As suggested by Earl J. Hamilton, 'Prices as a factor in economic growth' (*Journ. Econ. Hist.* XII, 1952, p. 344), by Colin Clark (*Review of Economic Progress* IV, 1952, p. 4), and now by Taylor.

⁷ Cf. T. S. Ashton, *Journ. Econ. Hist.* 1949, Suppl. pp. 19-38; *Economic History of England: The Eighteenth Century* (1955), pp. 233-5.

lead to contestable results.¹ The sources for such evidence are defective and may raise methodological difficulties.² Incomplete though these data are at present, they are compatible with a slight decrease, possibly with a slight increase, but not before the middle of the 1840s (if we omit short-term fluctuations) with a marked and obvious increase. Dr. Hartwell's cursory and ill-informed discussion has not changed this situation in the slightest.³

- 3 Chronic and cyclical unemployment, though at present only intermittently measurable, was almost certainly extremely high, and in times of crisis catastrophic. Few would doubt that it was much higher than in the period after the middle forties, but its effect on real wages, though plainly serious, remains to be investigated. As usual, the optimists (notably Hartwell) continue to neglect it entirely, though sources for local unemployment, analogous to those quoted in my earlier article, await the interested researcher.⁴ It may be worth illustrating the effect by the turnover figures for 50 Salford shopkeepers which fell as follows between 1839 – not an exceptionally brilliant year – and 1841 – a disastrous one:

	1839	1841
13 provision dealers	£70,700	£47,300
14 butchers	27,800	17,200
10 grocers	63,800	43,300
13 drapers, etc.	35,400	22,300 ⁵

Evidently no discussion which neglects unemployment can claim to be taken seriously.

- 4 While it is agreed on all hands that some sections of the population suffered while others improved their condition, the inadequacy of our occupational and income statistics does not allow us to estimate the size of the respective groups with any confidence. Such data as we possess at present are indeterminate. While a number of estimates are possible, the uncertainty of the assumptions which have to be made in order to construct them, makes it improbable that a conclusive answer can be found along these lines. However, no particular presumption exists in favour of an optimistic interpretation.
- 5 An optimistic presumption, however, appears to derive from certain global calculations such as those of the general trend of

¹ Taylor, p. 20, appears to agree; and T. S. Ashton has suggested privately that he does also.

² However, in the matter of actual diets I do not believe these difficulties to be so great as Hartwell 1, p. 244 suggests. Cf. Hobsbawm, p. 62.

³ Hartwell 2, pp. 406–12. For a fuller discussion of this matter see the Appendix.

⁴ E.g. for 1826 the *Report of the Committee appointed for . . . relief to the 'working manufacturers'*, London, 1829, and the *Report of the Committee . . . for the relief of the distressed manufacturers*, London, 1844, as well as more scattered data such as those for Bristol in 1817 in C. Chisholm, 'On the statistical pathology of Bristol and of Clifton, Gloucestershire' (*Edinburgh Medical and Surgical Journal*, 1 July 1817, p. 274). Since I did not claim that the scattered unemployment figures in Hobsbawm, pp. 52–7 establish trends for the entire period, I shall not cite yet more of them. However, *en passant* I may dismiss Hartwell's criticism of one set of my data (Hartwell 2, p. 398). The vagrancy figures I quoted do not 'consistently use . . . trough years of the cycle to indicate normal vagrancy'. The figures are used to show that in comparable years the numbers of vagrants at the same spots increased almost without interruption from one cycle to the next. That this indicates a trend is a reasonable inference. That vagrancy declined sharply within each trade cycle with the economic recovery, is specifically stated on p. 54.

⁵ J. Adshead, *Distress in Manchester, Evidence . . . of the state of the labouring classes in 1840–42*, London, 1842, p. 55.

the national income, and it is on these that the optimistic case now seems, in the main, to rest.¹ The argument is that, if we can rely on contemporary estimates, the rise in national income was so large that personal real incomes per capita must on average have risen also, which in turn is believed to imply that the real incomes of most people must have risen. In fact, this argument is a return to the reasoning of the contemporary liberal statisticians and economists (Porter, McCulloch *et al.*), whose case for the improvement of the condition of the people rested, as has been shown,² much less on hard evidence than on the inability to believe that an expansion of wealth and productive capacity so vast as that which was taking place in Britain, could fail to produce a rise in the standard of living of the labouring poor.

The difficulty about this argument is threefold. In the first place, like any indirect argument, it must yield to the facts. It is inconclusive, so long as the direct evidence about the standard of living does not permit us to know whether it rose sharply, and valueless if the direct evidence shows that the standard did not rise. It cannot be too often repeated that the debate, in the form which Clapham gave it, will be settled, if at all, not on the basis of presumption about what may have happened or general reasoning about what ought to have happened, but *only* on the basis of direct evidence. In the second place the argument itself rests entirely on a further hitherto unverified, at present unverifiable and somewhat improbable assumption, namely that 'an increase in per capita income (was) accompanied by a more equal income distribution'.³ Most of the space devoted by Hartwell to this topic is in fact filled by attempts to establish this second assumption, in the face of the (in the view of most students of industrialisation) more plausible contrary assumption that the early stages of industrialisation are likely to make the distribution of the national income *less* even, to allow for larger savings and more investments.⁴ It is perhaps worth observing, in passing, that the proponent of this argument is obliged to show not merely that the share of the labourers in the national income rose, but that within the labouring poor also its distribution did not become less even. For it is entirely possible for the total share of wages to rise while only a minority of labourers actually improve their real income. However, though arguments are plentiful, facts are scarce, and Hartwell's actual *evidence* for an increasing evenness of income distribution in this period is too negligible to be worth consideration.⁵ The third difficulty about the national income argument is also that of all arguments which incline us favourably to a certain view without being able to establish it. They are vulnerable to contrary presumptions which, while equally unable to establish themselves conclusively, point in the opposite direction.

¹ Hartwell 2, pp. 398-404.

² Hobsbawm, pp. 49-50 for a dissection of McCulloch.

³ Hartwell 2, p. 398.

⁴ Incidentally Hartwell does not deal with the point made briefly in Hobsbawm, p. 47, but not for that reason of small weight, namely that 'industrialisation under then prevailing conditions almost certainly required a more burdensome diversion of resources from consumption than is theoretically necessary, because the investment mechanism was inefficient. A large proportion of accumulated savings were not directly invested in industrialisation at all, thus throwing a much greater burden of savings on the rest of the community.'

⁵ Hartwell 2, pp. 402-3.

And there is a mountain-range of contemporary evidence and argument which does so.

The above summary represents not an extremist position, but almost certainly one which would today (apart from some of the present author's stylistic formulations) command general agreement more nearly than any other except sheer agnosticism. It amounts to the assertion that no certainty in this field is as yet possible, but that the hypothesis of a marked or substantial rise in the standard of living of most Britons between the early 1790s and the early 1840s is, as things stand, an extremely improbable one. The dates, however, are important. Chronological neatness leads us to talk loosely of periods such as 1800–1850. In fact, however, the debate is entirely about what happened in a period which ended, by common consent, some time between 1842 and 1845. After that there is no dispute about the fact of an improvement in the standard of living, and indeed this absence of dispute has meant that the subsequent period has been rather neglected by researchers. The fact that the 1840s divide between two entirely different trend-periods, has led to confusion in the past, e.g. in the debate about whether they should be called the 'hungry forties'.¹ (The layman may be surprised to find that there is such a debate about the decade which contains the Irish Famine; but English historians are often parochial.) What is worse, it has tempted careless historians to use evidence from the period after 1843–4 to throw light on the trend of the period before this turning-point.² It must therefore be very firmly pointed out that this procedure is illegitimate.

II

At this point one might conclude the survey of the debate. However, as the debate will no doubt continue, it may be as well to consider what sort of evidence will be needed to re-establish the optimistic case, now that the onus of proof once again rests on the optimists, and what sort will be inadequate.

Their first obstacle is the mountain of contemporary opinion, non-quantitative evidence and – as has recently been shown, hitherto neglected quantitative evidence – which cannot be overlooked. Unless it can be levelled or reduced to a hillock, the path of the optimist must be presumed to lead steeply uphill.

Now attempts to lighten the traditional gloom have been made first and foremost by discrediting the contemporary observers and (unless optimistic) theorists. It is true that Dr. Hartwell has denied that there was a prevalence of gloomy contemporaries or, at a later period, of gloomy historians.³ But this will not do. That there was a predominance of informed opinion inclined to, or implying, a dark interpretation of working-class conditions at that time – however

¹ Cf. W. H. Chaloner, *The Hungry Forties* (Historical Association, 1957).

² Cf. W. H. Chaloner and W. O. Henderson, *History Today*, July 1956, p. 456, and Hartwell 2 *passim*. To quote only sources used there which date from after 1850, we are given friendly societies' statistics from 1858 and evidence about the progress of the workers 1832–1867 (p. 404); Simmonds and McCulloch on food, both from 1859 (p. 407); sources from 1854, 1856 and 1879 (p. 409) of 1869 (p. 410), of 1859 (412); of 1856 (413), of 1854 (414). Sources which refer to the period 1843–50 abound. While this latter group is legitimate within Dr. Hartwell's chronological terms of reference, it has of course no bearing on my argument.

³ Hartwell 1, pp. 237–8, 239, 'For every contemporary that criticised, there was one that praised' and 'for every firm judgement about the industrial revolution in England... there has been an equally firm contrary judgement.'

nuancée – is admitted even by Professor Ashton.¹ That most of the historians between Marx and Clapham saw the Industrial Revolution as a 'bleak age' for the labouring classes, is not in fact denied at all.² As to whether the future would grow darker or rosier, there was genuinely even debate even in the 1830s and 1840s, and probably a predominance of optimism. Here, plainly, the optimists had the better case, for after all conditions did improve after the middle 1840s. But the improvement came later, and its most powerful chroniclers, like Giffen and the Fabians, often made their case by contrasting the heights scaled in the later century with the rock-bottom of the early industrial period.

The most obvious way of discrediting the pessimistic contemporaries is by claiming that they approached the subject not as disinterested inquirers, but with a marked bias; in general an anti-capitalist bias.³ It is perhaps characteristic that the equally marked bias of the meliorists, even when it leads – as in McCulloch's case – to striking perversions of fact, even if so plainly stated and unsupported by anything but rhetoric as with Macaulay, has not attracted the same criticism. Now in fact the accusation is wrong. Whatever their motives, enthusiastic supporters of liberalism collected material of the darkest hue, and Engels used them for preference as his sources in the vain attempt to escape the accusation. The most horror-stricken accounts of Manchester come from foreign liberals like de Tocqueville and Free Traders like Faucher.⁴ But whether true or not, the charge is irrelevant and the deductions from it wrong.

Whatever the motives which drove men to inquire into social conditions, their findings stand or fall by the normal criteria of evidence and argument. The fact that Royal Commissions were in those days means for achieving rather than for adjourning reform no more invalidates the findings of the blue books than Porter's obvious bias in favour of British capitalism invalidates the *Progress of the Nation*. Whether any source is true or if true, representative, is a matter for ordinary scrutiny. As it happens Engels' own book has been exhaustively scrutinized by two hostile editors anxious to prove its factual unreliability. Their failure to convict him of more than a handful of slips merely confirms the respect in which this remarkable piece of work has long been held.⁵ One would not claim that all contemporary sources stand up to cross-examination so successfully, but the exercise at any rate shows that partisanship need not *a priori* tell against a source.

The mass of contemporary evidence thus remains to block the road of the meliorist scholar. It can be unblocked only by the explosive charge of contrary evidence, strong, positive and relevant, as that adduced by the rearguard optimists is not, even when it dates from the right period. It will not do to base arguments about

¹ In F. A. Hayek, ed. *Capitalism and the Historians* (1954), p. 130.

² Hartwell 1, p. 230.

³ F. A. Hayek, *op. cit.* Chaloner and Henderson's edition of Engels, and Hartwell 1.

⁴ Engels, Preface to the first edition of the *Condition of the Working Class*; de Tocqueville, *Journeys to England and Ireland* (ed. J. P. Mayer 1958), Léon Faucher, *Manchester in 1844* (London and Manchester, 1844).

⁵ To demonstrate the editors' failure (as well as the pitfalls of their own bias) at length, would be to try the patience of the reader. But cf. E. J. Hobsbawm, 'History and the Dark Satanic Mills' (*Marxism Today*, May 1958) and introduction to F. Engels, *Situation de la Classe Laborieuse* (Paris, 1960) for some discussion of the Chaloner and Henderson edition.

the standard of living of the labouring poor on the rise of small as against large income-tax payers or fundholders, unless we can prove (what is very unlikely) that the rich are a representative sample of the poor.¹ If one thing is clear about the statistics of savings banks, which have been hopefully explored by meliorists ever since the early nineteenth century, it is that in our period the social composition of their depositors was highly untypical so that, for instance 'they afford no accurate test of the amount of existing misery in times of commercial depression.'² They carry no serious weight, especially when used in a purely rhetorical manner.³

It is equally inadmissible to argue that the feeble efforts of government in the period up to the early 1840s had much serious effect on the living-standards and working conditions of the labouring poor.⁴ Admittedly the Factories Act of 1833, though confined to a narrow sector of industrial work – in effect to women and children in textile mills – marked a genuine advance on the completely negligible legislation before this date, and was not rendered wholly inoperative by the reluctance of employers, many male workers and the law, to apply it or by the impossibility of effective inspection.⁵ But nobody not making an *a priori* case for amelioration would seriously care to rest a heavy weight of argument on its efficacy before the early 1840s, still less on the Mines Act of 1842, whose single inspector Engels rightly omitted to record, since that inspector himself, a year after the completion of Engels' book, commented on the Act's ineffectiveness.⁶

As for the rest of social and public health legislation in the period under discussion, it is best forgotten. The Truck Act of 1831 was largely a dead letter.⁷ Sanitary legislation can hardly be said to have begun in the early forties, and such improvements as had taken place, almost certainly lagged behind the even more rapid rise in urban population, as is of course demonstrated by the increasing frequency of urban epidemics.⁸ As the Select Committee on the Health of Towns wrote in 1840: 'It cannot be denied that considerable attention has been directed to sewerage and drainage within the last twelve years, and that great improvements have been effected during that period, still the want of any general system of operation and the defective powers possessed by the commissioners ... (both in London and the provinces) ... have altogether prevented the extension and construction of sewers upon a scale commensurate with the increase of population'.⁹ And though the chief

¹ Hartwell 2, p. 402.

² G. C. Holland, *The Vital Statistics of Sheffield* (London, 1843), p. 135. Cf. also Neil Smelser, *Social Change in the Industrial Revolution* (1959), pp. 372–5.

³ Thus Hartwell's (2, p. 404) single figure for the Manchester and Salford Savings Bank in 1842 proves nothing; not even what it purports to show, namely that labourers and industrial workers formed about one third of depositors. Smelser, *op. cit.* 374, shows that between 1821 and 1839 in this bank the three classes of factory employees, etc. Weavers and Labourers never formed more than 24.4% (1828), with the trend slightly downwards thereafter.

⁴ Hartwell 2, pp. 403–4.

⁵ Cf. M. W. Thomas, *The Early Factory Legislation* (London, 1948), *passim*.

⁶ J. H. Morris and L. J. Williams, *The South Wales Coal Industry 1841–75* (Cardiff 1958), p. 215. Chaloner and Henderson criticise Engels' failure to mention the appointment of this inspector as an example of his pessimistic bias.

⁷ G. W. Hilton, *The Truck System* (Cambridge, 1960), chap. VI, esp. p. 122.

⁸ J. B. Russell, *Public Health Administration in Glasgow* (Glasgow, 1905), p. 3, for the rise of these after 1818, reaching a peak in the middle fifties. Cf. also *Report of the Select Committee on the Health of Towns* (Parl. Papers, XI, 1840, Q.1137): 'We have proved that since 1816, but more peculiarly during the last seven years, fever has been steadily increasing in the city of Glasgow.'

⁹ *Loc. cit.* p. 293.

cities actually began to do something in the middle forties – Manchester after 1844, Glasgow in the last years before 1854 ('and then only a beginning'), Birmingham in the later fifties¹ – the optimist is well advised to steer clear of sanitary improvement before the later forties at the very earliest, if he wishes to be taken seriously.

Such feeble props can hardly hold up the case for 'the rising standard of living'. The case remains to be made. For it must be repeated, and in the face of criticism flatly repeated, that economic theory of whatever brand, gives us no *a priori* presumption in favour of a significant improvement of the standard of living in the period of early industrialisation, and a slight presumption against it.² The most usual historical case is, in Pollard's words, that of 'pressure on consumption and material standards of living of the mass of the population, at a time when it is forced to adapt itself to major social changes'. The onus of establishing a different state of affairs continues to rest on the meliorists.

III

A final and more defensive argument on the optimistic side remains to be considered, for the frank admission of defeat implicit in the view that capitalism did not cause deterioration, because this occurs in all industrial revolutions,³ hardly requires comment. It has been argued that, while conditions in the early nineteenth century were bad, and possibly not improving, they were better than in the eighteenth century, which the anti-optimists have persistently idealised. Hence the case for improvement stands.⁴

This is admittedly to call in the unknown to justify the half-known, for we know much less about eighteenth-century standards than we do about those of the period after 1790. Certainly we know too little to settle the argument in quantitative terms. Yet we do know enough to reject certain common contentions of the optimists, or rather to suggest that these express hope rather than research or even thought. These contentions are that urban conditions were better, or at any rate no worse, in the early nineteenth century than in the eighteenth, and that factory work was greatly superior to eighteenth-century domestic work.

Nobody doubts that rookeries as bad as those of the nineteenth century can be cited from the eighteenth. The issue is not whether 'slums and adulteration were peculiar products of industrialisation'⁵ but whether there was more of both in 1840 than in 1780. And of course there was. It is not only likely, but we actually know it.⁶ The issue is not whether in some unquantifiable sense 'rural life was

¹ A. Redford, *The History of Local Government in Manchester* (Manchester, 1939-40), I, p. 166; J. B. Russell, *op. cit.* p. 14; C. Gill, *History of Birmingham* (London, 1952), I, p. 369.

² Cf. Pollard and Taylor on this point. Hartwell 2, p. 398, criticises me not so much for what I say but for not saying what would be child's play to refute, namely that there is an *a priori* reason for expecting no *rise whatever* in the standard of living, under any conceivable circumstances.

³ 'To contend that living standards rose is not to extol the merits of liberal capitalism; nor does the view that they declined, necessarily imply its denigration . . . the retardation of living standards in the early stage of industrialisation has revealed itself as the experience of the socialist as well as of capitalist societies.' Taylor, p. 30.

⁴ Hartwell 1, pp. 236-7; Hartwell 2, pp. 414-5; Chaloner and Henderson, *Engels* introduction, pp. xiii-xiv.

⁵ Hartwell 2, p. 414.

⁶ For urban conditions, see above. For food adulteration, J. Burnett's monograph, *The History of Food Adulteration in Great Britain in the 19th Century* (London Ph.D. typescript, 1958), discusses the problem at length and has no doubt that adulteration increased greatly and had by 1848 reached enormous proportions (pp. 11-12).

naturally better than town life'. It is also, among other things, why the labourers of Wiltshire, hardly a pampered group, had on average something like twice the life-expectancy at birth of the labourers of Manchester and Liverpool, a comparison which is the staple of sanitary reformers' arguments in the 1840s and 1850s.¹ If it is objected that the superiority of rural health was not new, then it may be pointed out with equal legitimacy that the proportion of the urbanised was now much greater.

The problem of domestic industry and its exploitation and oppression is slightly more complex, for the optimists' view here is based not on simple error or omission, but on misconception. There can be little doubt that where the two coexisted in the nineteenth century, factory work was generally far more materially attractive, at least after the decline of domestic industry set in. The optimists' mistake here is to contrast an eighteenth century identified with 'domestic work' with a nineteenth identified with 'factory work'. But this is wrong. The Industrial Revolution did not merely replace cottage or slum workshop by factory, but multiplied *both* domestic industry and factories; the former either in direct dependence on the latter (as in cotton weaving), or in the rapidly expanding branches of production as yet quite untouched by the factory (as in the garment industry), or in industries whose scale remained small even when they adopted new power. It also eventually killed off many of the expanded domestic industries it had created. The fate of these vastly expanded and then sacrificed domestic branches is therefore just as much part of the social impact of the industrial revolution as the fate of the factory population. It is entirely illegitimate to reject the half-million and more handloom weavers of 1830² or the army of seamstresses as survivals from pre-industrialism. But for the Industrial Revolution most of them would not have been there, or at any rate their life would have been very different.

Moreover, domestic industry in this new phase was – at least after its early boom – probably much less attractive than before the revolution, even setting aside extreme cases such as the slow strangulation of the handloom weavers. Thus in Sheffield, grinders' disease was 'scarcely known' towards the end of the eighteenth century, but in 1842 it affected 34 per cent of all razor grinders (and between 50 and 100 per cent of all above the age of 30); a natural consequence of expanding the volume of production without adequate corresponding alterations in working and living conditions.³ It is therefore plain that neither an optimistic nor a gloomy case can rest on a comparison of factory and out-workers *at the same time*; yet optimists still continue to make such comparisons.⁴

The question how social conditions in the period of the 'take-off' and after compared with those before the industrial revolution must, in the present state of our knowledge, still be left open.⁵ All that can be said is that hitherto the attempts to bring it into the optimistic

¹ E. Chadwick, *Report . . . on an Inquiry into the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain* (London, 1842), pp. 154–65.

² Clapham, I, p. 179.

³ S. Pollard, *A History of Labour in Sheffield* (1959), pp. 62–3.

⁴ E.g. Chaloner and Henderson, *op. cit.* p. xiv, who quote the 1842 Children's Employment Commission for this purpose.

⁵ I see no reason to modify the provisional view expressed in Hobsbawm, pp. 60–1, except perhaps by a somewhat greater emphasis on the probable improvement in living standards between 1760 and the turning-point of the 1790s.

argument have been more marked by a desire to prove preconceived notions than by careful research.

IV

However, to compare the pre-industrial with the industrial age in purely quantitative terms is to play Lear without the King. For the debate between the optimists and the pessimists has been sociological as much as economic. Engels' own case in favour of the eighteenth century, for instance, was not merely that the standard of living of the cottagers was 'much better than that of the factory workers today', which is debatable, but that they lived in a far more secure, psychologically satisfactory and fuller community, though at the cost, which he freely admitted, of ignorance and stagnation. The crux of the Hammonds' argument was not simply that the early industrial age was poor, but that it was bleak. In other words, poverty and dirt *alone* are not the issue. The change from one way of life to another is equally at stake. But while the careful student of poverty can only say that the case for deterioration, while not implausible, cannot be proved, though that against a marked improvement is extremely strong, the sociological argument for deterioration is far more powerful.

Now this argument has been virtually absent from the debate since Clapham apparently worsted the Hammonds a generation ago, and recent anti-Claphamites have deliberately not stressed it, for they have rightly chosen to fight the Claphamites on their own chosen ground of quantitative indices. If the Claphamites were right, the non-quantitative arguments became irrelevant or at any rate secondary. The labouring poor might have been subjectively disturbed or unhappy, but at all events they wept all the way to their increasingly large Sunday dinners. Consequently the most effective way of controverting them was to show that there was no reason to believe that the Sunday dinners were becoming larger, and the case would be even stronger if the anti-Claphamites deliberately refrained from bringing in those non-quantitative considerations which the optimists had (mistakenly) dismissed as sentimental and misleading. But this does not mean that these considerations were ever unimportant. And now that the original Claphamite assault has been repulsed, it is time to say firmly that the attempt to dismiss the qualitative and sociological case against early industrialism must also be regarded as unsuccessful.

In fact no such attempt was really made. For the sociology of industrialisation implicit in most of the meliorist arguments is extremely primitive. It is barely more advanced than that of Peacock's 'Steam Intellect Society', and greatly inferior to, say, Engels'. We need hardly comment on extreme examples such as Chaloner and Henderson's remark that 'in the 1840s much hardship among workers was due to 'secondary' or 'self-induced' poverty, the result of excessive and feckless expenditure on drink, gambling and tobacco'.¹ The more moderate tendency, which merely holds that some people had one view about the social effects of industrial-

¹ *History Today*, 1956, p. 855. For comparison, Engels (Chaloner and Henderson edn. pp. 115-16) and Wilbert Moore (*Industrialisation and Labour*, Ithaca, 1951, p. 118), both of which stress the social factors leading to alcoholism in periods of industrialisation.

isation, some another, is equally futile.¹ For we know quite enough about the immense human strains imposed by the process of sudden and large-scale social transformation to state firmly that its eventual – or even its immediate – material benefits cannot be used to offset these strains, and that those who underestimate mass unhappiness or disturbance merely because they can see no adequate reason for it, are unqualified to talk about the subject.²

This is not the place to pursue the sociology of British industrialisation, which has fortunately once again begun to attract attention.³ It is enough to remind ourselves that the extraordinary depth, desperation and bitterness of the social discontent in this period (which the optimists have been entirely unable to explain) is at least a partial measure of the stresses to which the labouring poor were exposed. And it is enough to remind ourselves also that the unquantifiable and spiritual sense of loss they felt had a very real bias. The Suffolk farm-labourers, whose village used to be famous for its football in 1810 when custom still gave them a field in which, at certain seasons, they had the right to play games, had 'somehow or other' lost that right, and the field was now under the plough. Now they had no village green or common for active sports. Only 'of late they have introduced a little cricketing; and two or three of the farmers have *very kindly allowed* (my italics, E.J.H.) them to play in their fields'.⁴ Are we to omit both the loss and the change in their status from a realistic consideration of the effects of agrarian change on the English labourers of whom the traveller observed not only that they were 'severely straitened in their means of living' but also that they were 'servile' and 'broken-spirited'?⁵ Are we to overlook the decline and fall of the self-confident, coherent, educated and cultured pre-industrial mechanics and domestic workers – the Gloucestershire weavers, of whom in 1840 only 15 per cent could neither read nor write, while of the rioters arrested in the manufacturing areas of Lancashire, Cheshire and Staffordshire in 1842 55 per cent could not read and write even 'imperfectly';⁶ the community of Dunfermline weavers, destroyed in the 1830s, with its Tradesman's Library, savings bank, Mechanics, Institute, Literary and Scientific Club, Drawing Academy, missionary meetings, temperance leagues and infant schools, its Florists' Society and literary magazine (the *Dunfermline Gasometer*) – as well as its repub-

¹ Hartwell 1, p. 242.

² Cf. Margaret Mead, ed. *Cultural patterns and technical change* (UNESCO, 1953), for a bibliography of the large literature on these topics, and L. Chevalier, *Classes Laborieuses et Classes Dangereuses à Paris dans la première moitié du XIX siècle* (Paris, 1958), for an example of history which is aware of such problems.

³ E.g. Neil Smelser, *Social change in the industrial revolution* (1959), whose most valuable sections discuss the strain on the Lancashire operatives' family structure; a subject of which contemporaries were well aware.

⁴ Rev. J. S. Henslow, M.A., *Suggestions towards an enquiry into the present condition of the labouring population of Suffolk* (Hadleigh, 1844), pp. 24–5.

⁵ H. Colman, *The Agricultural and Rural Economy of France, Belgium, Holland and Switzerland* (1848), pp. 25–6. The contrast is with the 'civil, cleanly, industrious, frugal, sober ... better-dressed' French peasantry. This may be instructively compared with Arthur Young's observations on France and England at the end of the eighteenth century.

⁶ R. K. Webb in *English Historical Review*, LXV (1950), pp. 333 ff.; cf. the complaint of J. Fletcher, *Summary of the Moral Statistics of England and Wales* (1849), pp. 16–17, that the most producing districts appear to be the most ignorant, and 'the region making the slowest progress, in proportion to its ignorance, is the great northern and midland mining and manufacturing district – the great industrial heart of the empire'.

lican, jacobin and chartist puritanism and Swedenborgian and other heresies?¹

The fact that the employers and governing classes of the time utterly failed to understand what (apart from sheer poverty) might be troubling the labouring poor, was no doubt historically inevitable, though it also made the impact of the change more catastrophic.² But there is no similar excuse for the modern historian who denies that the coming of industrialism and urbanisation meant a 'depersonalisation' of human relations, or who argues simply that 'the breaking up of old social relationships was a liberating and stimulating experience', or who honestly believes that the social discontent of the period was due to the fact that 'although the standard of living was rising, it was not rising quickly, and the individual was only aware that his wages were meagre and not sufficient to satisfy his wants'.³ To admit the social stresses of industrialisation is not to deny their inevitability (though they could, of course, have been minimised); nor even, in the long run, to reject the price paid for progress. Not to admit their reality and gravity is to make any understanding of history impossible.

As is often the case, the poets saw things which the vulgar economists did not, and those who stammered their sense that the world was upside down were sometimes more correct than those who formulated their ideas lucidly. Charles Dickens, whose criticism of Coketown (a city which fully satisfied the Gradgrinds and Bounderbys) was not merely that its inhabitants were poor and economically insecure, but that it was *inhuman*, expressed the anguish of a generation more profoundly than those who might merely have observed, with justice, that its drains were defective and something ought to be done about it.⁴ The historian forgets at his peril that the problem of the social impact of the industrial revolution is not whether men live by white or brown bread, no meat or roast beef; even though it can be shown that in our period it did not actually give them any extra roast beef. It is also, that men do not live by bread alone.

POSTSCRIPT

Some publications relevant to this discussion have appeared since the dispatch of my manuscript and require comment. (1) M. J. R. Healy

¹ L. J. Saunders, *Scottish Democracy, 1815-1850* (Edinburgh, 1940), p. 127. 'It was this independent, lofty and pietistic radicalism which found its world awry after 1837', and incidentally gave to Andrew Carnegie, the son of one of its main pillars, a genuine interest in education and a disbelief in orthodoxy not found among the rest of his contemporary American millionaires.

² 'Domestic happiness is not promoted but impaired by all the members of a family muddling together and jostling each other constantly in the same room' (*Handloom Weavers Report, 1840*, p. 682. Cf. P. Gosden, *The Friendly Societies in England, 1815-1875* (Manchester, 1961), chapter V and pp. 169-172, for the utter failure of upper-class critics to grasp that workers founded such societies not merely to save money, but also for non-actuarial reasons.

³ T. S. Ashton, *The Eighteenth Century*, pp. 102-3, Hartwell 2, p. 414. It is, incidentally, time to look critically at such historically and sociologically doubtful phrases as 'revolutions of rising expectation'. Where the labouring poor have made or desired revolutions, it has been for other reasons than those usually implied in the phrase.

⁴ If Dickens is reckoned a sentimentalist, the French free-trader Faucher, who makes precisely the same point, can be quoted in his support: 'The town realises in a measure the utopia of Bentham. Everything is measured in its results by the standards of utility; and if the BEAUTIFUL, the GREAT and the NOBLE, ever take root in Manchester, they will be developed in accordance with this standard'. *Manchester in 1844*, pp. 24-5.

and E. L. Jones¹ have published a valuable series of wheat yields 1815–59. This shows fairly stable yields up to 1830, a modest rise of about 10% in the 1830s and a startlingly large one of 40% after 1840, which fits in with the picture of very rapid improvement in living standards after the effects of the 1842 depression had worn off. The actual figures before 1840 – about 31 bushels before 1830, 34 in the 1830s – can be expected to show ‘a substantial positive bias’ (p. 577) and ought to be deflated by about two-fifths in addition to this. They seem to fit in quite well with Drescher’s estimate (cf. Hartwell 2, 408) which argues that the increase in production just failed to keep pace with population. (2) Phyllis Deane and W. A. Cole² touch on the problem of meat, using the Smithfield figures, though noting Hartwell’s reservations (which I dismiss) and the Excise series (cf. Hobsbawm, pp. 65–7). Their conclusion is that ‘in the second half of the eighteenth century, and still more in the beginning of the nineteenth, the supply of beef failed to keep pace with the growth in population’ (p. 74). However, in general they appear to rehabilitate the Clapham-Silberling real wages approach to the standard of living, though using the Gayer-Rostow-Schwartz wholesale price index rather than Silberling’s. While their judgment must obviously carry great weight, the arguments which led Ashton and others to doubt the value of a wholesale index as a measure of the working-class cost of living (cf. Hobsbawm, p. 48) are not reconsidered. They recognise that ‘Clapham’s version of the optimistic view stood or fell by Silberling’ (or Rostow-Gayer-Schwartz). Their contribution has been to reopen discussion on this subject, though they also accept that their optimistic conclusions must be modified in the light of an unknown allowance for unemployment. About this we must still remain in the dark, though there can be no question whatever about the sharp diminution of cyclical unemployment after the 1840s. (Cf. Hobsbawm, pp. 53–4 and B. R. Mitchell and Phyllis Deane, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics*, 64–5). (3) McKeown and Record³ argue, by a process of elimination, that mortality diminished because of environmental improvements in the earlier part of the nineteenth century. Except for tuberculosis their evidence about a decline in mortality comes from after 1851. About tuberculosis they conclude that the evidence ‘should make us cautious in accepting a decline in the earlier years of the century’ (p. 113) and do not claim that there was such a decline before 1847. Since the authors do not actually say that mortality fell before 1841 but only that we cannot be sure what it was, the general value of their article for our period is limited. (4) H. J. Habakkuk⁴ deals incidentally with the discussion. I am not inclined to disagree with his view that ‘the inconclusive nature of the current debate about living standards in this period is perhaps a warrant for supposing that a substantial and general and demonstrable rise in the real wages of industrial workers did not occur until the 1850s and 60s’ (pp. 138–9).

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¹ M. J. R. Healy and E. L. Jones, ‘Wheat yields in England 1815–59’, *J. R. Stat. Soc. Series A*, vol. 125, part 4, 1962.

² Phyllis Deane and W. A. Cole, *British Economic Growth, 1688–1959* (Cambridge, 1962).

³ ‘Reasons for the Decline of Mortality in England and Wales during the Nineteenth Century’, *Population Studies*, November 1962.

⁴ *American and British Technology in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge University Press, 1962.

APPENDIX

Food consumption

Year	Cattle	Pigs	Sheep
(nearest '000)			
1830	48	57,000	—
1840	—	66,000	—
1841	52	65,000	—
1842	4,088	—	—
1843	5,197	—	—
1844	6,769	—	—
1845	27,682	—	—
1846	27,386	—	—

The general trend of argument in Hobsbawm appears to be accepted by Taylor, but has been sharply challenged in Hartwell 2. The arguments and (in so far as they exist) counter-arguments, are as follows:

- 1 I state that the per capita figures for tea, sugar and tobacco 'indicate no marked rise in the standard of living but beyond this little can be deduced from them'. Hartwell, while appearing to suggest that they support optimistic conclusions (406-7), does not in fact show that they can be used for this purpose.
- 2 I demonstrate a lag of meat consumption in London behind the growth in population from 1801 to 1841, on the basis of the Smithfield returns, and that the inconclusive excise figures for the provinces, 1801-1825, nevertheless appear to exclude a major rise in per capita meat consumption up to that date. I also consider that it is reasonable to take meat consumption as a criterion of the standard of living, and this is therefore crucial to my argument (Hobsbawm, pp 58-9, 62-8). On the second point Hartwell appears to agree; or at least to agree with Charles Dickens and Dodd whom he quotes on this point (p. 409). The fact is indeed obvious, and long ante-dates the industrial revolution, though Hartwell's totally unsupported and indeed quite implausible statement that 'in the first fifty years of the nineteenth century the English working class came to expect meat as part of the normal diet' suggests that he is unaware of this. (Cf. Drummond and Wilbraham, *The Englishman's Food*, 1939, p. 123, for an earlier period: 'It seems clear that the standard of living was judged to a considerable extent by the amount of meat eaten'.)

Hartwell's attempt to shake the Smithfield figures fails totally. I do not 'ignore any increase in carcass weight'. Three separate and concordant estimates for this are quoted for 1821, 1836 and 1842 (Hobsbawm, p. 50) which demonstrate no increase whatever; and I could add another to the same effect from the 1830s. The onus of proving such an increase rests on the optimists. The representative feature of the Smithfield returns is discussed in Hobsbawm, pp. 64-5, and *all* Hartwell's objections considered and rejected in advance. For good measure, a testimony to the representative nature of the Smithfield figures may be added from a leading expert on livestock (Youatt) for the mid-30s (*On the condition of the agricultural classes in Great Britain and Ireland ... With a preface by Henry Drummond Esq.* London, 1842, II, p 259). The figures Hartwell quotes for 1850 are irrelevant, (a) because there is no dispute about the increase in consumption in the later 1840s and (b) because they reflect the influence of the railways which, as I tried to show, did not affect supplies much before the early 1840s. The following table of livestock traffic on the Grand Junction Railway from Liverpool may illustrate the sharp increase in such methods of supply in the middle forties. (Source: *Facts and Figures, principally relating to railways and commerce*, by Samuel Salt, London and Manchester, 1848, p. 57.)

Year	Cattle	Numbers of Pigs (nearest '000)	Sheep
1839	43	57,000	—
1840	—	66,000	—
1841	322	66,000	—
1842	4,086	98,000	—
1843	7,197	142,000	—
1844	6,789	132,000	—
1845	23,682	234,000	55,000
1846	53,586	327,000	104,162

Hartwell, therefore, leaves the Smithfield problem precisely where it was before. A better knowledge of the sources might, however, have led him to draw attention to the increase of steamer-transported meat from Scotland to London, which was already observed in the 1830s (Drummond, *op. cit.* pp. 262–3; John Hogg, *London as it is, being a series of observations on the health, habits and amusements of the people*, London, 1837, p. 273). While this was no longer negligible (except in summer, cf. C. Knight, *London*, 1842, II, p. 322), there is no suggestion that this supply was anything like sufficiently large to fill the substantial gap between population and meat which existed in this decade.

Our ignorance of provincial trends after 1820 remains. It is, as I have suggested, possible that facts about the provinces might be very different. Such facts may exist, though I have been able to find only a few scattered ones (Hobsbawm, p. 67) and Hartwell has not found any others.

- 3 About cereals and potatoes, my argument was that the consumption of the latter increased sharply, but that the failure of wheat production to keep pace with population makes it impossible to use the old optimistic argument that the massive transfer from brown to white bread is evidence of a rise in the standard of living. There is no disagreement about the increase in potatoes, though there is argument about whether they were 'merely one of the many vegetables and fruits whose consumption was increasing' (Hartwell 2, p. 409). For at least one county there is evidence that they replaced other vegetables among farm labourers (Drummond, *op. cit.* II, p. 322).

As to wheat, Hartwell's own evidence suggests that (as I argued) production failed to keep pace with the rise in population (p. 408), and even on his – unsupported – optimistic assumptions, can hardly have exceeded it very much. He adds nothing of relevance or weight on the question of the transfer from brown to white bread.

- 4 On other foodstuffs I argued in favour of a probable decline in the consumption of milk and cheese (but not of butter) and of the unimportance of eggs. On milk Hartwell quotes figures from the 1850s, which are irrelevant or unreliable or both (p. 412). Thus against his estimate of 20,000 cows in London one might put another of 'upwards of 10,000 cows' from 1837 (Higg, *op. cit.* p. 226). On eggs he quotes figures from 1859, which are irrelevant. My evidence for their importance comes from the budgets in the works cited in Hobsbawm – Neild, Bosanquet and others. I see no reason to change my views. Conversely Hartwell argues in

favour of a large increase in fruit and vegetables, which I did not mention because there is little reference to them in contemporary dietaries. His opinion, based apparently on anachronistic data (mainly 1850 and 1870), is not shared by Taylor, p. 22, who takes the more plausible view that consumption of perishable commodities either declined or can hardly have risen much before the railway age.

- 5 I did not mention fish, and Hartwell is undoubtedly right in observing that its consumption increased rapidly, especially after 1830. There is no reason to doubt that this trend was general in the big cities. Unquestionably this improved the nutritive value of the poor man's diet, but Hartwell appears to be unaware of the bearing of his own evidence that the poor had a marked prejudice against this cheap and abundant food (Southey) and that 'the lower class of people entertain the notion that fish is not substantial enough food for them and they prefer meat' (Hartwell, p. 411). It suggests, if anything, that they moved to the cheaper and subjectively less desirable food because they could not afford the dearer.
- 6 Hartwell disagrees with my view that adulteration *increased*. He quotes Smollett to show that it *existed* in 1771, which is not in doubt. If he doubts its increase, he is wrong. (Cf. John Burnett, *The History of Food Adulteration in Great Britain in the 19th Century*, London Ph.D. 1958).
- 7 Hartwell's conclusion that the amount and variety of food eaten *unquestionably* increased (p. 412) therefore appears to be based mainly on the use of sources suspect for their optimistic bias, or, more frequently, of data for the period after the middle 1840s. But of course these are irrelevant to the present discussion. Even so, the use of the adverb would seem to be frivolous.

The Standard of Living during The Industrial Revolution: A Discussion*

II By R. M. Hartwell

I

In my two articles¹ on the standard of living during the Industrial Revolution, which Dr. Hobsbawm now criticises, I was concerned both with surveying the literature of the controversy, and also with analysing the available evidence to see if conclusions could be made. The conclusions I came to were, first, the controversy has been confused by arguments about values and by people talking about different things as though they were talking about the same thing, and second, that there had been 'an upward trend in living standards during the Industrial Revolution' and that 'the standard of living of the mass of the people of England was improving . . . slowly during the war, more quickly after 1815, and rapidly after 1840'. This conclusion I modified by stressing that the standard of living was *not* high and was not rising fast *before* the forties, and also that there was 'dire poverty' and 'cyclical and technological unemployment of a most distressing character'. I emphasised also that increasing real income was no measure of 'ultimate well-being' and that the period of the Industrial Revolution was one of political discontent and social upheaval – but also that it was a period of increasing opportunity for working-class men and women. To this 'extreme' view I still hold, and it may be compared with the latest conclusions of Dr. Hobsbawm, which seem mild enough – consumption figures 'are compatible with a slight decrease, possibly with a slight increase', the case for deterioration 'while not implausible, cannot be proved', 'the view that there was substantial, or any, deterioration has not yet been firmly established', 'the argument that real incomes remained roughly stable will commend itself as the most acceptable formula' – but which are established in such a fashion as to create an impression of pessimism, quite apart from the grand final conclusion that, whatever can be said about material standards, 'the sociological argument for deterioration is far more powerful'. Indeed, Dr. Hobsbawm's convictions show not so much in his mild conclusions as in the fervour with which he defends Engels and attacks the optimists.

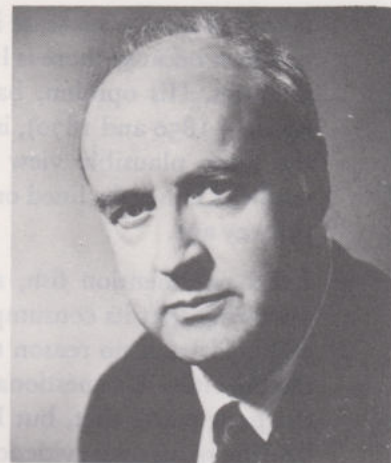


Fig. 9 R. M. Hartwell

* *Economic History Review*, Vol. 16, August 1963, pp. 135–46.

¹ 'Interpretations of the Industrial Revolution in England: A Methodological Enquiry', *Journal of Economic History*, 1959; 'The Rising Standard of Living in England, 1800–1850', *Economic History Review*, 1961. These articles were a slightly revised version of a paper presented in 1953 to the Canberra Meeting of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science. They were published long after they were written so that students could refer to two modern and different interpretations of the Industrial Revolution. When Dr. Hobsbawm claims that the 'optimistic' view has recently been 'sharply challenged' I assume he refers to himself for I know of no other recent 'pessimist' contribution in English. But perhaps he is referring to a very critical comment on my second article by the Russian historian N. A. Erofeev (in *Voprosy istorii*, 1961, no. 11, pp. 192–4), who certainly challenges the optimistic view with arguments and methods very similar to those of Dr. Hobsbawm. Mr. Erofeev concludes: 'It follows that the evidence put forward by the author [Hartwell] yet again bears witness to the futility of the attempts of reactionary bourgeois historiography to throw doubts on the long since decided question of the deterioration of the position of the English workers in the first half of the nineteenth century.'

II

Dr. Hobsbawm's discussion is 'to survey the battlefield'. The military metaphor reflects Dr. Hobsbawm's idea of how historical controversy should be conducted; when he is a combatant, he believes in total war. And so he spends much time attacking the expertise and the evidence of the historians with whom he does not agree. Thus, the optimists (J. H. Clapham, T. S. Ashton, etc.) are 'committed' to an 'a priori case for amelioration' and have 'a desire to prove preconceived notions'; their sources and evidence are 'suspect for their optimist bias', 'irrelevant', 'anachronistic', 'feeble props', 'too negligible', 'highly untypical'; their analysis and conclusions are 'brash' (about Ashton and Clapham!), 'unqualified', 'implausible', 'improbable', 'frivolous', 'careless', ' cursory', 'ill-informed', 'inconclusive', 'unsupported', 'illegitimate', 'futile', 'not now based on reliable evidence', 'carry no serious weight', 'purely rhetorical', 'striking perversions of fact'. At the same time as he batters the opposition with pejorative adjectives, Dr. Hobsbawm assumes victory and righteousness; he assumes the optimists and their sources are wrong, until they prove the pessimists wrong: 'the onus of proving the gloomy and traditional views are wrong, continues to rest squarely on the optimists'. As part of the assumption of being right, Dr. Hobsbawm posits time and time again an alleged generally acceptable 'conventional view' – 'the traditional case for deterioration in labour conditions' – and imputes agreement with his interpretation of history by the majority of good men: 'few would doubt', 'common consent', 'a predominance of informed opinion', 'the mass of contemporary evidence', 'general agreement', etc. He tries also to discredit the optimists by attributing to them statements they have never made and views they have never held. This is done partly by stating optimist generalisations in an extreme form by using unreasonable adjectives and adverbs which, if they were removed, would leave reasonable, or at least debatable, propositions. As Dr. Hobsbawm states them, however, they are convenient 'Aunt Sallies' for him to demolish; for example, 'the hypothesis of a *marked* or *substantial* rise in the standard of living ... is ... an extremely improbable one', or 'the view that real wages rose *markedly* during our period is not now based on reliable evidence' (italics mine). In this way Dr. Hobsbawm ascribes to J. H. Clapham and T. S. Ashton an extreme view and claims in consequence that it is a point now 'clearly established ... that the traditional Clapham-Ashton view has been dislodged without resistance'. But J. H. Clapham had already 'modified' his original non-extreme position in the 1939 Preface to the second edition of his history: 'I did not mean that everything was getting better. I only meant that recent historians have too often, in my opinion, stressed the worsenings and slurred over or ignored the bettering'.¹

More directly, however, Dr. Hobsbawm misquotes or misrepresents the optimists. Thus, for example, my article on 'The Rising Standard of Living in England, 1800–1850' is misused. For example, Dr. Hobsbawm chooses from the sentence – 'Generally, as historical analyses of economic development have shown, an increase

¹ *An Economic History of Modern Britain. The Early Railway Age, 1820–1850*, Cambridge University Press, 2nd ed. 1939, Preface.

in per capita income has been accompanied by a more equal income distribution' (with a footnote reference to Kuznets) – only the following – 'an increase in per capita income (was) accompanied by a more equal income distribution' (Dr. Hobsbawm's 'was') – turning a general into a specific statement, and implying that I was referring only to England during the Industrial Revolution. There are many other examples, but I do not want here to catalogue all Dr. Hobsbawm's misrepresentations.¹ Nor do I want to discuss the methodological and ethical problems of writing history in this fashion. Nevertheless it is necessary to have some knowledge of Dr. Hobsbawm's methods to make the understanding of his history possible.

III

Dr. Hobsbawm claims that 'we cannot at present derive a satisfactory and representative real wage index for our period', and that the lack of such an index makes the use of wage-price data 'not now ... reliable' for generalisations about the course of real wages. On the contrary, as Phyllis Deane and W. A. Cole point out, 'For the nineteenth century there is a vast amount of miscellaneous material in average wages and wage rates. This was thoroughly worked over by Bowley and Wood ... It would still be possible to strengthen and fill out their results with raw material relating to other years and other industries, but it seems unlikely that the additional data would modify the long-term trends which emerge from their studies.'² There are a number of price indices – Jevons, Sauerbeck, Silberling, Kondratieff, Rousseaux, Schumpeter, and Gayer, Rostow and Schwartz – and also a number of wage series – Wood,³ Bowley, Tucker, Kondratieff, Phelps-Brown and Hopkins, and Gayer, Rostow and Schwartz – in addition to a great deal of wage data in industrial histories. Here is a large body of statistics, the result of much detailed research, that cannot simply be assumed away because generalisations from them are inconvenient for Dr. Hobsbawm. Gayer, Rostow and Schwartz, for example, concluded from their statistics that 'the most striking single fact concerning labour in the second period (1815–1850) is that money wages declined, in net, very slightly; less even than food prices and much less than other retail goods'.⁴ Similarly, Deane and Cole have generalised more recently about working-class standards of living that 'there was a negligible improvement in the Napoleonic war years, an upward trend in the immediate post-war years (though this may have been outweighed by post-war unemployment), an unprecedentedly rapid improvement in the second quarter (which might also be modified on the basis of unemployment data) and an indisputable rise in the third and fourth quarters'.⁵ It is because of such figures that J. L.

¹ For example: p. 121, giving a wilful twist to T. S. Ashton's views on pp. 158–9 of *The Industrial Revolution*; p. 126, implying quite wrongly that Hartwell used only a 'single figure' to generalise about savings banks; p. 125, claiming barely that T. S. Ashton had admitted that 'a predominance of [contemporary], informed opinion' was pessimistic (*Capitalism and the Historians*, pp. 128–31), although Ashton qualified significantly; p. 131, stating that Hartwell attributed social discontent solely to one cause, which he did not do; etc. [pp. 33, 38, 37, and 43 in our reprint].

² *British Economic Growth, 1688–1959*, Cambridge, 1962, p. 22.

³ Wood's index of industrial wages before 1850 was based on figures for 24 towns and coalfields, and over 30 industries.

⁴ A. D. Gayer, W. W. Rostow, and A. J. Schwartz, *The Growth and Fluctuations of the British Economy, 1790–1850*, Oxford University Press, 1953, vol. II, p. 657.

⁵ *Op. cit.* p. 27.

Hammond long ago conceded that: 'Let us take it that so far as statistics can measure material improvement there was improvement',¹ and moved on to a consideration of higher and unmeasurable deteriorations.

The inverse movements of money wages and prices after 1815 is important also for two other reasons: (i) the phenomenon is powerful evidence against a monetary interpretation of the price decline, and, since trade unions were not yet powerful enough to exercise a significant monopolistic pressure on the supply side of the labour market, the rising tendency in real wages must have been associated with the increased productivity of labour; (ii) the phenomenon is also powerful evidence that labour competition (even with increasing population and Irish immigration), technological and structural unemployment, and the trade cycle – factors on the supply side of the labour market which could have led to a lowering of wages – were more than offset, in determining the price of labour, by a sustained and increasing demand for labour that kept up money wages when all other prices were falling.

IV

Unemployment is certainly relevant in considering standards of living, and except for technological unemployment (which I discussed in some detail in my previous article), I have not dealt with it adequately. Nor has Dr. Hobsbawm, who suggests, however, that chronic cyclical unemployment, although a short-term phenomenon, more than offset any long-term gains from rising real wages. But why, then, did not money wages fall in the period of falling prices? In any case, cyclical unemployment can only be relevant, in comparing real wages over different long periods, if the intensity of the cycle varies greatly in the different periods. There was a cycle in the eighteenth century, and again after 1850, but it has not yet been proved that the cycle between 1800 and 1850 was responsible, *proportionately*, for more unemployment than the cycles before 1800 or after 1850. 'Few would doubt', writes Dr. Hobsbawm, 'that it [unemployment] was much higher than in the period after the middle forties.' The onus of proof, in this case, surely rests with Dr. Hobsbawm?

V

Dr. Hobsbawm's chosen period ends conveniently after the depression of 1842, of which he is so fond. Anything about the period after 1845 he dismisses as being irrelevant, irrelevant because 'the debate is entirely about what happened in a period which ended, *by common consent*, some time between 1842 and 1845' (italics mine). 'What is worse', he continues, 'it has tempted careless historians to use evidence from the period after 1843-4 to throw light on the trend of the period before this turning-point'. In so far as there are recognisable trend periods in the nineteenth century, the turning point is either 1848-9 (marking the trough of the downswing after the boom of 1844-5), or 1850-1 (marking the end of the long period of falling prices). Thus, the one detailed, indeed massive volume on trends and cycles in this period, that of Gayer, Rostow and Schwartz,

¹ *Economic History Review*, January, 1930, p. 219.

uses the years 1815 to 1850 as a trend period. 1850 or 1851 is also the terminal date accepted by W. T. Layton, by J. R. T. Hughes, and by Phyllis Deane and W. A. Cole. Indeed, if there are any events that 'by common consent' mark the end of an era and the beginning of a new, they are the gold discoveries of 1849-51 and the Great Exhibition of 1851. What is important, in considering the relevance of what happened after 1845 (Dr. Hobsbawm's turning point), is *the rate of change* at which the standard of living was improving thereafter, and *the absolute level* (compared with 1800) reached in the early fifties. If there was stability, or decline, in real wages up to 1845 (as Dr. Hobsbawm claims), and if (as the evidence warrants, and even as Dr. Hobsbawm seems to admit) the standard of living in the early fifties was *substantially* above that of 1800 (and I would agree with J. H. Clapham that it was at least 40 per cent higher), then the whole of the improvement must have come in five, or at most ten years. If this is not plausible (and I think it is not), Dr. Hobsbawm has either to discredit the evidence of this later period (for example, evidence from G. R. Porter, 1847; T. Tooke and W. Newmarch, 1848-1856; Report of Commissioners on Smithfield Market, 1850; H. Mayhew, 1851; B. Poole, 1852; 'The Commissariat of London', 1854; and G. Dodd, 1856), or else has to allow that real wages had been improving over a longer period. Moreover, there is no indication in the multitude of wages indices of a spectacular rise in real wages after 1845. And so the relevance of the sources that establish a real-wage level in the early fifties that was well above that of 1800 now becomes obvious; they prove that this standard of life could only have been achieved over a period longer than the ten years after 1845.

VI

Dr. Hobsbawm claims – although a reading of J. H. Clapham and T. S. Ashton, and even of Hartwell, will show the claim to be quite untrue – that the optimist case rests 'in the main' on 'certain global calculations such as those of the general trend of the national income', which he cannot accept. 'In the first place', Dr. Hobsbawm writes, 'like any indirect argument, it must yield to the facts.' Second, 'the argument itself rests entirely on a further hitherto unverified, at present unverifiable and somewhat improbable assumption, namely that "an increase in per capita income [was] accompanied by a more equal income distribution"'. Third, the argument is 'vulnerable to contrary presumptions which, while equally unable to establish themselves conclusively, point in the opposite direction'. Dr. Hobsbawm's basic assumption here is that 'global calculations' are a *different* kind and a *less reliable* kind of historical fact than what he calls 'direct evidence'. But global calculations surely are aggregates of 'the facts', of 'the direct evidence' as Dr. Hobsbawm understands them. Moreover, these aggregates – of national income, population, industrial production, trade, public finance and capital accumulation – *all* point to an increasing per capita real income, and are *not* vulnerable, as Dr. Hobsbawm claims, 'to contrary presumptions'.¹

However, Dr. Hobsbawm is right to stress, as I did, the importance of knowing the trend in distribution in order to interpret the aggregate statistics. Dr. Hobsbawm now claims (i) that any improve-

¹ Real national income per capita was increasing; industrial production per capita was increasing; imports per capita were increasing faster than exports per capita; the burden of taxation per capita was decreasing and its incidence becoming less regressive; capital accumulation was not achieved at the expense of consumption; all these aggregate indices were achieving higher rates of growth than the rate of growth of population.

ment in income distribution is 'unverified' and 'improbable', (ii) that 'economic theory of whatever brand gives us no *a priori* presumption in favour of a *significant improvement* in the standard of living in the period of early industrialisation' (italics mine), and (iii) that real wages were kept down 'to allow for larger savings and more investment'. I have already produced some 'direct evidence' – from taxation returns, from the changing structure of employment (the shift from lower to higher paid employment), from social legislation (the trend, in spite of Dr. Hobsbawm, was towards protection and improvement)¹, and from public finance (for example, the repeal of the beer duty in 1830, which, as J. H. Clapham pointed out, added £1 per annum to the average household) – that income distribution was improving. In any case, such was the rate of increase of national income, that stability, or even a slight worsening of distribution, would still have left the worker better off in 1840 than in 1800. But the argument here is also deductive: the application of generalisations about growth and income that have been derived by the economists from theory and from the study of time series over a long period and from a large number of countries.² The relevant generalisations are: (i) generally, there has been over secular periods the simultaneous rise, at similar rates of growth, of income and its components (consumption and investment); (ii) generally, rises in national savings rates have been the response to secular rises in per capita income; (iii) the share of wages in national income over secular periods has generally been constant in the earlier decades of growth, and thereafter an increasing proportion of national income; (iv) economic development over a long period has generally been accompanied by a more equal income distribution, although, as E. H. Phelps-Brown has emphasised, 'the changes in real wages due to distributive shifts have been very small compared with those associated with the movements of productivity'. These generalisations certainly apply to England *after* 1850, when more accurate statistics allow the measurement of the relevant indices. In the period *before* 1850, when real national income, capital accumulation and productivity were all rising faster than population, it is reasonable to assume also that the standard of living of the workers was rising.

Against this assumption one might argue, as Dr. Hobsbawm does, and 'globally' on this occasion, that investment during the Industrial Revolution was of such magnitude that average consumption was not only curtailed but reduced. But the one detailed attempt to estimate capital accumulation over this period, by Phyllis Deane and W. A. Cole, concludes: 'In the early stages of the Industrial Revolution the level of capital formation – measured as a percentage of national income – rose only slowly. At this period, covering the last quarter of the eighteenth century and the first quarter of the nine-

¹ Dr. Hobsbawm dismisses the Factories Act of 1833 as having little influence before 'the early forties', citing M. W. Thomas (*The Early Factory Legislation*, London, 1948). But the whole burden of Thomas' chapters 7, 8 and 9 – on the inspectorate and the enforcement of the act – is to demonstrate how *well* the act worked in spite of difficulties, even before 1840. As regards sanitary reform, which I did not discuss, Dr. Hobsbawm claims that it 'can hardly be said to have begun in the early forties', ignoring the work even before 1835 of authorities for special purposes; e.g. the Lighting, Paving, Cleansing, Street and Improvement Commissioners, which are so well described by S. and B. Webb (*Statutory Authorities for Special Purposes*, London, 1922). See also J. T. Ward (*The Factory Movement 1830–1855*, London, 1962, p. 31): 'By 1830 some of the worst features of the early factory system had been amended.'

² The literature is now vast, but see, for example, 'Quantitative Aspects of the Economic Growth of Nations' by Simon Kuznets in *Economic Development and Cultural Change* (four articles between 1956 and 1960) and 'Essays in the Quantitative Study of Economic Growth', *ibid.* (vol. IX, No. 3, Apr. 1961). See also the numerous publications of *The National Bureau of Economic Research*, New York; e.g. C. D. Long, *Wages and Earnings in the United States, 1860–1890*.

teenth, savings were being used more productively and a large portion of the new developments were taking place in industries with a relatively low ratio of capital to income.¹ The upward shift in the rate of capital accumulation – from the 5 or 6 per cent of 1780 to the 10 per cent of 1860 – took place between 1830 and 1860 rather than in the earlier period.² In any case, although it is obvious, as the theory of income determination demonstrates, that in the short run increased savings implies reduced consumption, we are here considering a period of at least half a century during which the productivity of investment, because of technical progress and improved industrial organisation, was high, and when the real cost of most investment, until the railways in the forties, was relatively low.

There is also the problem of what happened to the goods produced. Increasing home demand had been of paramount importance in stimulating the beginnings of industrialisation in the eighteenth century; increasing real wages during the Industrial Revolution provided the large and increasing market without which the goods of the new technology could not have been sold. Certainly it was not foreign demand that sustained continued industrialisation. Indeed, during the period of rapid economic growth after 1815 'the home market seems to have responded more readily than the overseas trade, and United Kingdom domestic exports averaged 10 per cent or less of national income for most of the first half of the nineteenth century'.³

VII

Dr. Hobsbawm twice claims that the eighteenth century is 'unknown' and that 'in the present state of our knowledge', comparisons with the nineteenth century 'must . . . still be left open.' Elsewhere, however, he still posits a golden age, and, in comparison with the earlier period describes how the labouring poor of the Industrial Revolution felt an 'unquantifiable and spiritual sense of loss', and how 'the self-confident, coherent, educated and cultured pre-industrial mechanics and domestic workers' declined and fell (in spite of agreeing also with Engels that the pre-industrial workers lived in 'ignorance and stagnation'). But the researches of Mrs. M. D. George, Miss D. Marshall and the Webbs reveal a pre-industrial society that was static and sordid, with the labouring poor on subsistence wages and periodically decimated by cycles, plagues and famines. What Dr. Hobsbawm has to prove is that living conditions in the eighteenth century were *better* than in the early nineteenth, not, as we all know, that conditions during the Industrial Revolution were bad. Again, it proves very little that life-expectation was higher in the country than in the cities of the Industrial Revolution; it was also higher in the eighteenth century, and it is still higher to-day. What

¹ *Op. cit.* p. 308.

² Cf. A. K. Cairncross (*Factors in Economic Development*, London, 1962), who argues that 'the first steps in industrialisation may not put any great strain on the supply of capital if they are confined to factory production in the less capital-intensive industries' (p. 118), and that technical progress (which could be capital-saving or could raise output without additional saving, p. 101) has been more important in raising living standards than capital accumulation (p. 107).

³ Deane and Cole, *op. cit.* p. 310. See also W. Ashley, *The Economic Organization of England* (London, 1914), p. 154.

Dr. Hobsbawm has to explain away is that average life-expectancy increased between 1780 and 1840, during the Industrial Revolution. In the most detailed examination yet made of the decline in mortality during and after the Industrial Revolution T. McKeown and R. G. Record conclude that 'the main reason for the rise in population in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was an improvement in economic and social conditions'.¹

VIII

But perhaps the whole debate is irrelevant? In his final paragraphs Dr. Hobsbawm argues that, although the case for deterioration of material standards 'while not implausible, cannot be proved' (a disarming concession after so much argument) 'the sociological argument for deterioration is far more powerful'. The claim is accompanied by the usual accusations that the optimists have neglected sociological problems, that they 'underestimate mass unhappiness or disturbance merely because they can see no adequate reason for it, and are unqualified to talk about the subject'. As with the debate on material standards, Dr. Hobsbawm has commenced what might become a new debate with a thoroughly gloomy picture, claiming that the social effects of industrialisation were all evil. On the relationship of material progress (or deterioration) to social progress (or deterioration), and even on the precise nature of social deterioration, he is more vague, using such phrases as 'spiritual sense of loss', 'loss and change in status', 'immense human strains', and 'the extraordinary depth, desperation and bitterness of the social discontent'; and Dr. Hobsbawm's only excursions into social theory to explain these alleged conditions are, on the one hand, to claim the 'inevitability' (italics mine) of 'the social stresses of industrialisation', and, on the other, to generalise, not very originally, that 'men do not live by bread alone'. This debate on the dynamics of social change cannot be concluded here, but some *specific* social gains of this period might be mentioned to offset in the minds of more impressionable readers the pessimism of Dr. Hobsbawm: (i) the increasing social and economic independence of women, (ii) the reduction in child labour, (iii) the growth of friendly societies, trade unions, savings banks, mechanics' institutes and co-operative societies, (iv) the growth of literacy (more of the population could read and write in 1850 than in 1800), and (v) the changing character of social disorder, which, as F. C. Mather recently demonstrated, was much less brutish and destructive in the 1840s than in the 1780s. The Marxist doctrine of social and economic evolution cannot be protected for ever, even by Dr. Hobsbawm, from that misfortune, long ago foreseen by Herbert Spencer, of being 'a deduction killed by a fact'. And in this case, the facts are legion.

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¹ 'Reasons for the Decline of Mortality in England and Wales during the Nineteenth Century', *Population Studies*, November 1962, p. 122.

APPENDIX

*Food Consumption*¹

Dr. Hobsbawm argues that 'the study of actual consumption is the least likely to lead to contestable results' and concludes, discussing *only* food consumption,² that the evidence is 'compatible with a slight decrease, possibly a slight increase, but not before the middle of the 1840s . . . with a marked and obvious increase.' This conclusion contrasts markedly with the opinion of the pessimists (e.g., Engels) whose 'extreme' views, nevertheless, Dr. Hobsbawm does not condemn. But what Dr. Hobsbawm has to say about the consumption of tea, sugar, tobacco, meat, cereals, vegetables, fruit, milk, eggs and fish is so different from what I say that further detailed analysis of at least the staples – wheat and meat – is necessary to reconcile our respective interpretations, and to supplement my previous 'cursory and ill-informed discussion [which] has not changed this situation the slightest'.

On tea, sugar and tobacco I agree that per capita consumption does not indicate 'a *marked* rise in the standard of living' (italics mine); nevertheless, there was a persistent upward trend in the consumption of all three, as some simple arithmetic on the import statistics shows; and since all three were imports for which the statistics are reasonably complete and accurate, the conclusion is unambiguous.³ However, it is unlikely that any of these commodities was of great importance in determining the working-class standard of life before 1850, although sugar consumption is now often taken as a sensitive indication of trends in living standards.

On wheat Dr. Hobsbawm dismisses the evidence I used on the acreage, yields and prices, and re-asserts without proof that wheat production failed to keep pace with population. New evidence on wheat yields (to supplement the series of M. K. Bennett⁴) by E. L. Jones and M. J. R. Healy,⁵ from actual crop-cutting data between 1815 and 1859, shows that my 'reasonably plausible assumptions' about yields, which would have allowed production to keep pace with population, were too modest. I assumed an increase in yield from 20 bushels per acre in 1800 to 30 bushels per acre in 1850; Jones and Healy now give an average yield in 1850 that is almost 50 bushels per acre. Their average annual yields for the four decades after Waterloo are; 1816–25, 30.8; 1826–35, 33.3; 1836–45, 42.4; 1846–55, 47.0. (The highest and lowest yields for the same decades were: 37.3 and 25.3, 41.5 and 27.1, 54.8 and 30.7, 57.3 and 37.9). These figures come from the same source used by T. Tooke a century ago to prove that in the thirty years after 1815 'the increase in England on the Average Acreable Produce of Wheat is very much greater than it is in the habit to suppose'.⁶ This rising yield was the result of the greatly increased investment in agriculture during the

¹ On the history of English agriculture I have been greatly assisted by Mr. E. L. Jones of Nuffield College.

² Per capita consumption of consumer goods other than food also increased; e.g. soap, leather, linen, cotton and wool. The importance of domestic consumption after 1815 is clearly proved by the fact that exports averaged no more than 10 per cent of national income before 1850.

³ Gayer, Rostow and Schwartz, *op. cit.* vol. II, pp. 957–67, for an analysis of the consumption of tea, tobacco, wine, rum, sugar and coffee.

⁴ 'British Wheat Yield per acre for Seven Centuries', *Economic History*, Feb. 1935.

⁵ 'Wheat Yields in England, 1815–59', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, ser. A, vol. 125, pt. 4, 1962.

⁶ *A History of Prices . . . 1848–1856*, London, 1857, vol. V, pp. 127–8, 131–2.

high price period of the war in the form of inputs whose effects were long term: for example, the considerable improvement in the range and acreage of fodder crops, the heavier stocking and the richer manuring of arable, better drainage and greater attention to cultivation. The consequent increase in productivity was reflected in the downward trend in the price of wheat after the war, although the increasing demand for bread meant, as W. S. Jevons showed later, that the price of wheat did not fall as low between 1815 and 1850 as the average price of 40 basic commodities. The conclusions, that increasing productivity lowered grain prices after the war, and that grain output kept pace with population until 1838, are also reached by Mr. F. M. L. Thompson in his *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century*.¹

On meat Dr. Hobsbawm still clings to the Smithfield killings as a reliable index of London (and English?) consumption. But, for reasons I have already detailed,² after the middle of the eighteenth century alternative sources of meat supply to Smithfield were increasingly important; for example, Irish meat imports into London were already substantial by 1800.³ In any case, Deane and Cole have used Smithfield and other data to compile a meat index which shows an increase of 35 per cent between 1781-91 and 1811-21, compared with a 25 per cent increase in population, demonstrating that at least until 1820 meat supply was keeping pace with population.⁴ There is no reason to suppose the ratio changed unfavourably between 1820 and 1850. Indeed, a large growth in the output of livestock from English farms during the half century 1800 to 1850 was made possible by the long-term trend towards improvement in the type and status of fodder crops in rotation and by the extension of stock-fattening on arable farms on free-draining soils, described by P. Pusey in 1842 as 'a great revolution in farming'.⁵ Livestock productivity was increased particularly by the early maturity that the growth of fodder crops allowed; resulting in the case of the New Leicester and its crosses in a saving of 20 per cent in production costs.⁶ It is true that productivity increased more in the forties than before, mainly because of the falling prices after 1840 of bone-manure and oilcake, but there had been since the eighteenth century a slow but certain growth in livestock productivity. The changes which made this possible - better rotations and forage crops - improved breeding and early maturing - were long-term trends stretching back into the seventeenth century in the case of crop rotations and into the eighteenth in the case of livestock breeding. The shifting emphasis from grain to livestock, under the impetus of the increasing demand for meat that came with increasing living standards, occurred in three stages: slowly between 1780 and 1850,

¹ London, 1963, pp. 232-3.

² 'The Rising Standard of Living in England, 1800-1815', *op. cit.* p. 410.

³ See also J. H. Smith, 'The Cattle Trade of Aberdeenshire in the Nineteenth Century' (*Agricultural History Review*, vol. III, 1955), showing the rise in the numbers of cattle sent by sea to London from Aberdeen after 1828.

⁴ *Op. cit.* p. 72. Deane and Cole declare that English beef supply failed to keep pace with population (p. 74), although their table on p. 72 proves the opposite for the period 1780 to 1821. They do stress the compensating importance of meat imports after 1800.

⁵ 'On the Progress of Agricultural Knowledge', *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England*, vol. III, 1842, p. 197. For an account of technical change and agricultural investment leading to higher cereal and livestock output in a particular area, see E. L. Jones, 'The Evolution of High Farming, 1815-65, with reference to Herefordshire' (Oxford D.Phil., 1962).

⁶ P. Pusey, 'Present State of the Science of Agriculture in England', *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England*, vol. I, 1840, p. 17.

more rapidly between 1850 and 1873 when the price of meat rose much more quickly than the price of bread, and very rapidly after 1873 when the price of bread fell away markedly with massive imports of cheap grain and when the price of meat fell much less than the general price fall.¹

I am, therefore, quite unrepentant about 'the totally unsupported and indeed quite implausible statement' (there were, in fact, two references) that 'in the first fifty years of the nineteenth century the English working class came to expect meat as part of their normal diet'. It is true that there were agricultural areas still in the forties (for example, Kent and Sussex) where meat was not common, but is it possible to believe that when meat was served regularly in the workhouses after 1834, that it was not eaten regularly by the labouring poor? The Poor Law Commissioners in 1836 circulated both instructions that 'on no account must the dietary of the workhouse be superior or equal to the ordinary mode of subsistence of the labouring classes of the neighbourhood', and also, as recommended diets for men, diets actually in use in different parts of England: of the six diets quoted all contained meat (1, three times a week; 1, once a week; and 4, twice a week), as well as suet pudding and cheese.² A Nottingham workhouse in 1842 included 7 oz. of meat at dinner on two days a week, and beef soup on two other days; the same diet included milk, porridge, potatoes (only twice a week), cheese, and beer (once a week). The workhouses of Cornwall were advised, also in 1842, to serve fish.³ Other evidence on workhouse dietaries, supplied by M. Rose of Manchester University, gives the following weekly meat consumptions at various places at dates between 1832 and 1847: Leeds, 1832, meat three times per week, total 18 oz.; Warminster, 1836, twice, 13 oz.; Thorne, 1839, three times, 15 oz.; Halifax, 1841, four times, 5 oz. + 5½ lb. stew; Keighley, 1842, six times, 36 oz.; Sheffield, 1847, four times, 10 oz. + 1½ pts. hash + 1½ lb. meat pie. On fish Dr. Hobsbawm insists, as with potatoes and bread, that increasing consumption was not a sign of increasing variety in food habits, but rather proof of the necessary substitution of an inferior for a superior food. In the absence of proof of the decreasing consumption of meat, however, this thesis is difficult to sustain, for if meat consumption was stable or increasing it is more plausible to argue that the eating of fish was a matter of availability (increasing supply after 1830) and choice (e.g. when fish was cheap or meat was dear). On other foodstuffs, see for example, the 1836 workhouse diets; all diets included cheese regularly (three had it daily); two diets had butter regularly; four had potatoes regularly (but *not* every day); other foods used were vegetables, gruel, soup, rice and suet pudding, yeast dumplings.⁴

The game of quoting isolated statistics, in view of the contrary evidence that Dr. Hobsbawm and I are able to produce, seems less fruitful in deciding the debate about consumption than a more general analysis of the changing structure of agricultural production, such as I have attempted above. As with industry, the trend

¹ See E. L. Jones, 'The Changing Basis of Agricultural Prosperity 1853-73', *Agricultural History Review*, vol. X, 1962, pp. 102-19, for the 'Golden Age' switch to livestock.

² *Second Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners for England and Wales*, London, 1836, p. 63.

³ *Eighth Annual Report* . . . , p. 205.

⁴ I could also repeat my previous evidence ('The Rising Standard of Living', op. cit.), underlining the fact, however, that evidence from authors writing *after* 1845 are not necessarily 'irrelevant' as Dr. Hobsbawm claims they are.

in agriculture was towards markedly increasing productivity. It was for this reason that the classical economists early abandoned the Malthusian theory about food supplies and population. 'After 1835 no economist expounded the Malthusian theory without taking note of the empirical evidence that contradicted it.'¹ And even Mill, who questioned whether 'all the mechanical inventions yet made have lightened the day's toil of any human being', became convinced that population had not 'pressed' on population between 1800 and 1850 and that after 1820 'subsistence and employment in England has never increased more rapidly'.²

¹ M. Blaug, *Ricardian Economics: A Historical Study*, Yale University Press, 1958, p. 117.

² *Principles*, 5th ed. 1862, pp. 751, 161.

40.5 Evaluating History and Historians

328 If you have mastered the material contained in this last four weeks of correspondence, you should now be much better able:

(a) to read history (that is to say, although you are aware that there are bound to be differences of opinion and controversies among historians, you now have a basic idea of how to judge whether one historian is more worth paying attention to than another);

(b) to write history (that is to say, given sufficient basic information, you should be able to plan and write a short history essay; your essay will differ from those of other students doing this course, and, of course, different interpretations can be perfectly acceptable, but you now appreciate that there are also basic principles upon which your tutor can decide whether one essay is better – more historical, more true to how things actually did happen – than another).

329 Here is a checklist of the points which have come up during the last four weeks, against which you can evaluate: (a) books by historians (and would-be historians), and (b) your own essays.

- 1 Depending on the level of communication the historian is aiming at (monograph, pop history, student essay, etc.) he should have made efficient and critical use of all the sources available to him. His work should, in this sense, be scientific.
- 2 Again depending upon the readership aimed at, the historian should communicate his information in a clear and efficient manner. At best his manner of presentation should conform to the highest canons of literary style, showing that history is art as well as science.
- 3 Depending on the subject of study, and bearing in mind both that history is concerned with change through time, and with explanation and interconnections, he should establish a reasonable balance between narrative, analysis and description.
- 4 He should seek always to be concrete and precise and to steer clear of the dangers involved in (a) periodisation, (b) relating art etc. to historical context, and (c) historical semantics.
- 5 History should not be propaganda. Grosser subjective influences should always be eliminated. Yet historical writing often derives an extra quality from the special point of view of the author. Completely objective history is an impossibility.

You should now be in a position to complete the final essay assignment for this part of the course.

RADIO SUPPLEMENT 4

Radio Programme 4: Controversy in History

This programme is concerned with controversy in general, that is to say with the points made in Sections 40.3 and 40.4. It is based on one particular controversy, the controversy over the standard of living during the Industrial Revolution. The two participants in the programme are Professor E. J. Hobsbawm and Dr. R. M. Hartwell, whose argument in the 1963 *Economic History Review* is reprinted in Section 40.4. Their discussion is long and difficult but it is in any case important that you should see what a genuine learned article looks like; and, from the point of view of this radio programme, you will get much more out of it if you have made the effort to read the articles.

It is not necessary that you should understand every single point, but rather that you should get the general flavour of the two different lines of argument. Hobsbawm is arguing against what he calls the 'optimistic' view put forward by two famous economic historians, Sir John Clapham and T. S. Ashton. Clapham and Ashton argued that there were good basic economic reasons for believing that standards of living were rising in the early nineteenth century. Hobsbawm is arguing that the basic economic evidence does not in fact support this conclusion, that you cannot definitely say that real wages were rising. He then goes on to develop what he calls the 'pessimistic' argument by reference to the way in which the *quality* of life got worse (he calls this the 'sociological' argument). Hartwell essentially takes issue with him on the basic economic, quantitative argument. He argues that there is in fact evidence, as Clapham and Ashton said, to support the contention that in basic economic terms real living standards were rising.

You are not, let me repeat, being asked to master the details of this particular controversy. What we are concerned with is why historians, in any controversy, disagree with each other. That is the first question. The second question is, what value does this sort of controversy have? In the course of the discussion we will try to reveal some answers to both of these questions. During the course of the programme you will be asked to note down such answers as you have managed to pick up yourself: you can use the boxes provided below.

I (Reasons for disagreement)

2 (Value of controversy)

Note: My own answers will be provided at the end of the programme.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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TEXT

Dr. R. M. Hartwell and the Economic History Review for 'The Standard of Living, II', *Economic History Review*, vol. 16, August 1963; Professor E. J. Hobsbawm and the Economic History Review for 'The Standard of Living during the Industrial Revolution: A Discussion, I', *Economic History Review*, vol. 16, August 1963; Methuen & Co. Ltd. for *The Rise of Modern Industry*, by J. L. and Barbara Hammond, 1925; Oxford University Press for *The Industrial Revolution*, by T. S. Ashton, 1948 (the Hammonds and Ashton are quoted in Philip A. M. Taylor's *The Industrial Revolution in Britain*, D. C. Heath & Co., 1958).

ILLUSTRATIONS

The Mansell Collection for Fig. 1; Weidenfeld & Nicholson Ltd. for Figs. 3a and 3b, from *Industry and Empire*, by E. J. Hobsbawm; Edinburgh Public Library for De Wits Map, Fig. 4; University of Chicago Press for Figs. 5a and 5b, from *History of Western Civilisation*, by William H. McNeill; William Collins, Sons & Co. Ltd. and the Trustees of the National Library of Scotland for Fig. 6; Guildhall Museum for Fig. 7; Professor E. J. Hobsbawm for Fig. 8; B. J. Harris for Fig. 9.

Notes

Humanities and the Study of Civilization
The Yoruba of Nigeria
Technology, Society, Religion and the Arts: Some Questions
The Artist and Society

What History Is, and Why It Is Important
Primary Sources
Basic Problems of Writing History
Common Pitfalls in Historical Writing

Introduction to Literature (Part I)
Introduction to Literature (Part II)

Introduction to Art (Part I)
Introduction to Art (Part II)

Introduction to Music (Part I)
Introduction to Music (Part II)

Form and Meaning (Part I)
Form and Meaning (Part II)

Which was Godel?

What is a Gospel?
What is a Gospel?

Giorgio Vasari: Renaissance Art-Critic and Art-Historian

Shakespeare's World

Descartes: The Father of Modern Philosophy

Mendelssohn's Redemptory of Bach (Part I)
Mendelssohn's Redemptory of Bach (Part II)

The Industrial Revolution
Part I: The Railway: The Revolution of the Machine
Part II: How the Railway System was Created
Part III: Glasgow: Transport, Mechanization and Society
The Debate on Industrialization
Is Man a Machine?
Art and Industry
D. H. Lawrence's The Rainbow

Introduction to Logic (Parts I-IX)
Introduction to Logic (Parts X-XVIII)

HUMANITIES: A FOUNDATION COURSE

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- 2 The Yorubas of Nigeria
- 3 Technology, Society, Religion and the Arts: Some Questions
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History

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- 15 Form and Meaning (Part I)
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- 17 } Which was Socrates?
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What is a Gospel?

- 19 } What is a Gospel?
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Vasari

- 21 } Giorgio Vasari: Renaissance Art-Critic and Art-Historian
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Hamlet

- 23 } Shakespeare's *Hamlet*
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Descartes

- 25 } Descartes: The Father of Modern Philosophy
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Mendelssohn

- 27 Mendelssohn's Rediscovery of Bach (Part I)
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Industrialisation

- 29 { The Industrialisation Process:
 - 30 { Part I: The Railway: The Evolution of the Machine
 - 30 { Part II: How the Railway System was Created
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- L1 Introduction to Logic (Parts I-IX)
- L2 Introduction to Logic (Parts X-XVIII)

